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A publication of the University of Illinois Springfield

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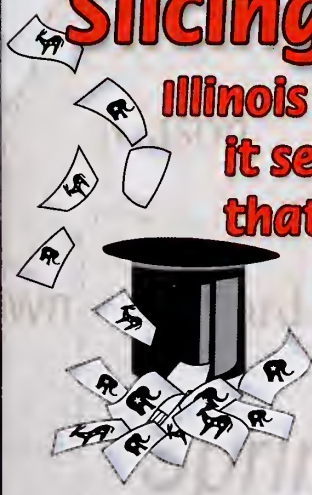
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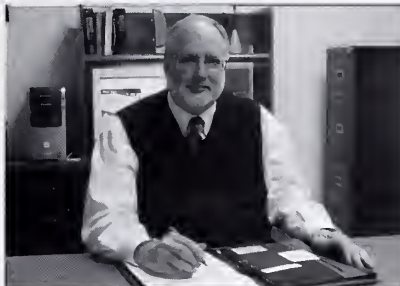
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*Dana Hempel*



## Groundbreaking broadcaster signs off

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of Illinois Springfield. He says it's just time for younger blood to take over.

Forty-six years after he began his professional career in radio news at WCIL in Carbondale, Bradley's legacy is secure. Aside from working for commercial broadcast stations in Herrin, Carbondale

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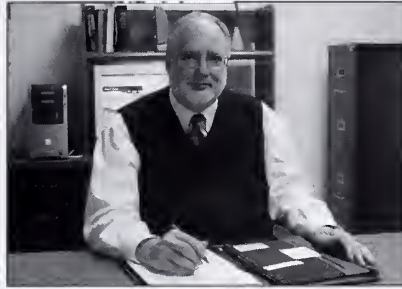
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Dana Heupel



## Groundbreaking broadcaster signs off

by Dana Heupel

To call Rich Bradley a fixture in Illinois public radio news would do him a disservice. Fixtures, after all, are normally installed after a structure is created. When it comes to the Illinois Public Radio network and several other notable broadcast constructions in this state, Bradley was the creator.

If you regularly listen to any National Public Radio station in Illinois, you probably have heard his smooth baritone providing news reports from Springfield or hosting the popular *State Week in Review* program. But no more: At the end of September, at age 69, Bradley retired as news director of WUIS, the capital city's public radio station and a sister unit of *Illinois Issues* in the Center for State Policy and Leadership at the University of Illinois Springfield. He says it's just time for younger blood to take over.

Forty-six years after he began his professional career in radio news at WCIL in Carbondale, Bradley's legacy is secure. Aside from working for commercial broadcast stations in Herrin, Carbondale



Rich Bradley

and Springfield, he was among the originators of the commercial Illinois News Network in the 1970s, and he became the mastermind behind the Illinois Public Radio network in the '80s.

In the fall of 1974, Bradley was recruited from the Illinois News Network in Springfield to become the first news director for what was to become WSSR, the public radio station that was being established at Sangamon State University. The call letters later changed to WSSU and then to WUIS when Sangamon State became the University of

Illinois at Springfield.

The roots of the statewide public radio news network began to take hold in the early 1980s, when the Springfield public radio station hired its first full-time reporter at the Statehouse. "The other public stations in Illinois began to express an interest and call and ask for selected stories from time to time about something going on in the state Capitol," Bradley says. "We fed that audio over a telephone link to them."

When those requests began to increase, "that's when I conceived of the idea of working out some kind of mechanism where, in an organized way, we began sharing stories. I was interested in what was going on in other parts of the state; those stations, of course, were interested in what was going on in the Statehouse."

The stations continued to share audio over telephone lines until 1985, when the General Assembly created the Illinois Public Broadcasting Council, along with an annual funding mechanism for public radio and television that is administered

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through the Illinois Arts Council. "In that initial legislation ... there was a one-time-only appropriation to the council to buy satellite distribution equipment for the radio stations and for the TV stations. On the radio side, the money was used to purchase the hardware for a satellite uplink, which is located here at WUIS. That became the way that we began to distribute — statewide — high-quality audio from the state Capitol over the NPR satellite system," Bradley says.

"The advent of that uplink really did kind of cement and crystallize Illinois Public Radio as it exists today," he says. That is why a public radio listener in Peoria can now hear a news report about an event in Carbondale, or a listener in Rockford can follow the news at the state Capitol in Springfield over his or her local station. "It evolved from feeding, originally, audio — poor quality, as it turned out — over dial-up telephone lines to the stations, to the advent of this satellite distribution system which had its hub with the uplink here in Springfield." In recent years, Internet technology has supplanted the satellite uplink. Now, most stations access one another's stories through a computer server based at WUIS.

While technology changed during Bradley's time as a radio newsman — from reel-to-reel recorders to cassettes to mini-disks to digital files that are edited over computers — reporting skills have pretty much stayed the same. The advent of conservative talk shows has altered the tone of commercial radio, he says, "but it's still a goal for people who work in public radio journalism to be objective — as objective as you can possibly be, anyway."

He also has seen the decline of local news at commercial radio stations, "primarily because of deregulation nationally. ... You had a lot of corporations move in and start buying up all these local stations and began to look strictly at the bottom line, rather than the community service that most of those stations historically have provided." Syndicated talk shows and music programs edged out local news, he says.

When Bradley recalls stories he worked on during parts of five decades,

the one that stands out the most happened during his last year: the impeachment of a sitting governor. "That still has to be the biggest, most-significant story that the station covered," he says. "I don't think you can argue the historical significance of that."

WUIS broadcast the Illinois House impeachment hearings live, along with other events that led to Gov. Rod Blagojevich's removal from office. Other significant stories include an interview with then-Gov. Dan Walker after he was defeated in the primary, and being one of a handful of reporters at a local hotel for a speech by Jimmy Carter when few knew the former Georgia governor and presidential candidate. WUIS also broadcast live Barack Obama's 2007 announcement at the Old State Capitol in Springfield that he was running for president and his announcement there in 2008 of Joe Biden as his running mate.

Bradley says that in retirement, he will miss the camaraderie at WUIS, as well as with his radio colleagues throughout the state. "You're kind of like a family, and you get to know everybody's business." He'll also have to slowly adjust his internal clock after arising between 3 and 3:30 a.m. for the last 30 years to prepare for his morning broadcasts. He expects the transition at the local station to be seamless.

As for his impetus in creating the Illinois Public Radio network, Bradley remains typically modest. "That only happened, you know, because I happened to be the news director of the public radio station that happened to be in the state capital that happened to have a bureau in the state Capitol building that happened to be covering state politics and government."

That may be true. But Bradley still had to create the structure before the network could become a fixture. He was the one who made it all happen.

\* \* \*

As it has been in recent years, our December issue will be online only. You can find it at <http://illinoisissues.uis.edu>. We will resume our print publication in January. Have a happy holiday season.

*Dana Heupel can be reached at [heupel.dana@uis.edu](mailto:heupel.dana@uis.edu).*



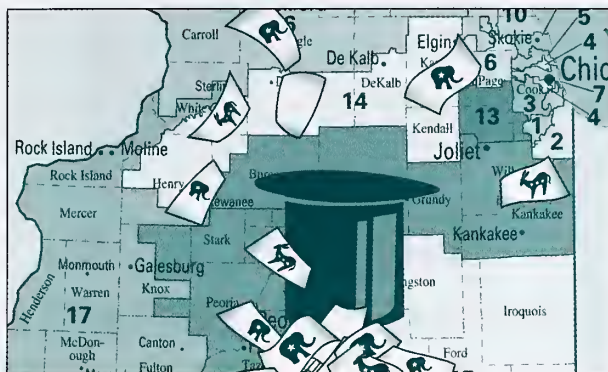
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Bethany Jaeger



## New Corrections policies take aim at underlying causes of crimes

by Bethany Jaeger

Within 90 days of being on the job, Illinois Department of Corrections Director Michael Randle announced sweeping changes in the way offenders are either sentenced to prison or diverted to community-based programs.

In September, he joined numerous public officials, reform advocates, criminal justice experts and journalists at a Chicago seminar sponsored by the John Jay College Center on Media, Crime and Justice, as well as the Pew Center on the States. Two days of dialogue offered a new perspective on how the corrections system could deal with unsustainable growth in the prison population, reduced staff levels with mounting overtime costs and chronic “tough-on-crime” laws that enhance penalties without regard to their consequences to the overstretched system (see *Illinois Issues*, September, page 6).

Effective January 1, 2010, a new law called the Illinois Crime Reduction Act has the potential to shift the focus away from unconditional incarceration and toward more informed decisions regarding crime prevention and rehabilitation.

The initiative is designed to first understand why offenders commit crimes, then find the most effective way to change their behavior. The ultimate goal is to keep nonviolent offenders out of prison, reduce recidivism rates and eventually save money.

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*The initiative is designed to first understand why offenders commit crimes, then find the most effective way to change their behavior.*

In a year when state budget cuts exceeded \$3 billion, Senate President John Cullerton says fiscal constraints create an opportunity to make smarter decisions about spending money up front rather than spending it on more expensive services later.

For instance, while it costs about \$7,363 to imprison a low-level drug offender for a typical 120 days, it would cost \$4,425 to provide community-based drug treatment to the same offender, according to the Illinois Consortium on Drug Policy at Roosevelt University’s Institute for Metropolitan Affairs.

That comparison is accompanied by good news and bad news, says Kathleen Kane-Willis, the institute’s interim director.

The good news is that more drug treatment alternatives have become available since 1980. The bad news is that lawmakers have simultaneously increased the penalties for drug crimes, making it

more difficult for offenders to become eligible for treatment as an alternative to imprisonment.

Beyond repeated drug offenses, recidivism rates in general are fed by barriers throughout the prison and parole systems. When ex-offenders return home, often to low-income neighborhoods with high crime rates, they’re bound to get caught committing technical violations of parole, says Deanne Benos, assistant director of the Illinois Department of Corrections since 2003. She adds that the parole system has focused on “gotcha” tactics rather than on rehabilitation.

The new approach starts with an assessment of offenders. It’s supposed to identify the traits that make them more likely to break the law again.

Within one year after the new “risks and needs assessment” project begins, 25 percent of offenders will have been assessed, according to Randle. That figure will climb to 50 percent within three years and 75 percent within five years.

Alison Shames, associate director of the Center on Sentencing and Corrections at the Vera Institute in New York, says the new evaluations should reveal whether prisoners have mental health problems, live in unstable environments, lack family support, depend on drugs or have other conditions or attitudes that could make them more likely to violate their parole or the law again.



Once the corrections department knows each of those so-called risk factors, the information is supposed to follow the offenders through the system.

That could be possible through a new initiative to link courts, probation, prison and parole, so all of those elements can make more informed decisions about each offender.

For instance, the system is designed to offer graduated parole options, which would consider the risk of an individual re-offending, the severity of the original violation and whether re-imprisonment or home confinement would be most effective.

Technical violations of parole should not automatically push ex-offenders back into prison. Prison should be the last option for some nonviolent offenders.

If successful, the new system could help offenders transition back into their communities and ensure that they have support needed to follow up on treatment of their underlying issues.

One success story so far is Sheridan Correctional Center. The adult male medium-security prison in north-central Illinois was redesigned as a substance abuse treatment facility to reduce recidivism rates for nonviolent offenders.

Leslie Balonick is senior vice president of the WestCare Foundation, which offers behavioral health treatment at Sheridan and in eight other states. She used to be senior policy and program development administrator for the Illinois Department of Corrections.

From Day 1, she says, Sheridan was designed based on data. In 2003, when then-Gov. Rod Blagojevich announced Sheridan would reopen as a drug treatment prison, nearly 40 percent, or 13,558, of all prison admissions were for drug crimes, according to WestCare. Roughly 30 percent were for property crimes, many of which were believed to support drug addictions.

Once prisoners were behind bars, they were likely to return. In 2004, more than half, or 53.3 percent, of the 36,000 adult inmates set to be released that year were expected to return to prison within three years.

Sheridan kept that in mind when designing its treatment model. Some inmates stay for nine to 12 months,

---

***Technical violations of parole should not automatically push ex-offenders back into prison. Prison should be the last option for some nonviolent offenders.***

which research shows is the most effective length of time for that type of drug treatment program to be effective. Other inmates are given one to two years, which allows them to enter more intensive programs that offer vocational training in everything from carpentry and culinary arts to horticulture and manufacturing. They also can access services that teach parenting and anger management, as well as adult education courses.

Once inmates leave, Sheridan's reentry program coordinates care with community-based providers so they have a continuing support system.

Data has been collected in real time, allowing Sheridan officials to prove to the General Assembly that its programs work and deserve full funding from the state, Balonick says.

Recidivism rates of those who graduated from Sheridan's drug treatment and reentry program dropped, according to a 2006 report by the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority. Sheridan participants had a 44 percent lower reincarceration rate (7 percent versus 17 percent) six months after they were released. Those who spent nine months at Sheridan had a 49 percent lower rate.

Based on lower reincarceration rates, the state saved about \$2.1 million, according to the report.

Another way the state could save money down the road, says Cullerton, is through a program dubbed "Adult Redeploy." Based on an existing program geared toward juveniles, the adult program could give county governments financial incentives for creating alternative sentencing. If counties reduce the number of people they incarcerate by a certain percentage, the state would give them money that otherwise would have gone into the prison system. Counties could distribute that money to local

community-based services. On the other hand, they could face penalties if they didn't reduce the number of offenders they sent to prison.

Illinois Redeploy, the original pilot program for juvenile offenders, has helped reduce the number of incarcerated juveniles by 51 percent, according to a 2008 annual report. The program started in 2005 with four pilot projects in Macon, Peoria and St. Clair counties and rural southeastern Illinois. In all, 382 minors were diverted from incarceration. While it cost about \$4.9 million over three years, it saved \$18.7 million.

For offenders already in prison, the Crime Reduction Act includes another seemingly controversial initiative — although less so as people become more educated about it — to release about 1,000 nonviolent offenders who have less than a year left to serve. Gov. Pat Quinn and Randle dedicated \$2 million to releasing nonviolent drug offenders and giving them ankle bracelets and parole officers.

The concept of early release is supported by the John Howard Association, a Chicago-based prison reform group, as well as Treatment Alternatives for Safe Communities. In a statement, Treatment Alternatives president Pamela Rodriguez said, "In our extensive history working with the justice system, we have found that alternatives to incarceration are far more effective ways to reduce crime for the vast majority of nonviolent, short-term drug-involved offenders."

The Crime Reduction Act shows progress in changing attitudes about dealing with the reasons individuals commit crimes. The initiative has the potential to create a more holistic approach to deal with people who could turn out worse if sent to prison than they were before.

But all of that progress depends on how the programs are implemented and whether they're adequately funded.

Ensuring adequate funding would require lawmakers to overcome the temptation to pass more tough-on-crime laws. Instead of seeking immediate gratification, they clearly should aim for long-term payoffs. □

Bethany Jaeger can be reached at [capitolbureau@aol.com](mailto:capitolbureau@aol.com).

# BRIEFLY

## Chicago paleontologist identifies new dinosaur

Tipping the scales at about the weight of an average high school quarterback, a newly discovered dinosaur has paleontologists rethinking the evolutionary family tree of the largest predator at the end of the Cretaceous Period, *Tyrannosaurus rex*. The early relative of T. rex, named *Raptorex kriegstein*, was about 9 feet long, weighed around 150 pounds and had the hallmark anatomical features of a large head with powerful jaws, small arms and long, strong running legs. Raptorex also had the enlarged olfactory bulbs of its larger cousin, indicating a keen sense of smell used to hunt prey.

Paul Sereno, professor in organismal biology and anatomy at the University of Chicago, led a team of researchers in describing the nearly whole skeleton.

"It's 95 percent complete. We're only missing the tip of its tail," says Sereno.

Found in northeastern China, Raptorex was illegally unearthed and sold to a vendor. A private fossil collector, Henry Kriegstein, bought it, brought it to Chicago and donated it to science. Because it arrived in a block with surrounding soil, fish and plants, Sereno and his team could date the skeleton at 125 million years old.

Much smaller than T. rex, Raptorex was every bit the effective and ferocious killing machine of its distant progeny — "jaws on fast legs," says Sereno. Finding Raptorex, a "small blueprint" of T. rex, upset the working theory of paleontologists that T. rex developed its distinctive features as its size evolved. Over millions of years, T. rex grew to its giant size — 40 feet and 7 tons, the largest predator on earth the last 25 million years of the Mesozoic Era — because the design found in Raptorex allowed it to out-compete all other predators until the disappearance of all dinosaurs 65 million years ago.

Image by Todd Marshall, courtesy of the University of Chicago



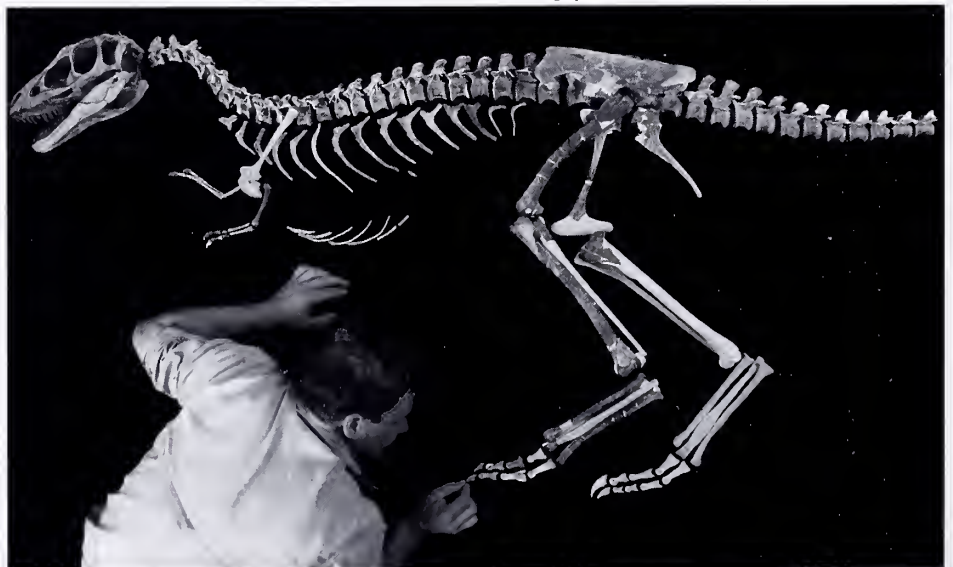
The study by Sereno and five co-authors was published in *Science* magazine, appearing first in its online edition.

Sereno says he wants to exhibit Raptorex in Chicago as part of a teaching

program called Project Exploration that aims to involve girls and inner-city youth in the excitement of scientific discovery.

Beverly Scobell

Photograph ©Mike Hettwer, courtesy of the University of Chicago



Paul Sereno led a team of researchers in identifying *Raptorex kriegstein*, an early relative of *Tyrannosaurus rex*.



## Specialized courts tailor options

First there were drug courts, followed by courts specializing in treatment of mental health, domestic violence and veterans. Now Cook County could eventually operate a so-called prostitution court.

Judge Paul Biebel Jr., presiding judge of the Criminal Division of Cook County Circuit Court, is meeting with individuals to devise a protocol for a court tailored to prostitutes.

"Judges have the power of sentencing, and as part of their sentencing, they can order probation with certain kinds of treatment in lieu of going to the penitentiary," Biebel says. "And that treatment may be drug treatment or mental health treatment or, in this instance, the specialized treatment that will come with women who have been consistently arrested for prostitution."

About 34 percent of the Cook County Jail's female population in 2002 was charged with prostitution, and many suffered from addictions, mental health disorders or trauma related to childhood abuse, says Terrie McDermott, executive director of the Office of Women's Justice Services in Cook County. She says such women could do well in a prostitution court that, like drug and mental health courts, takes a holistic approach by coordinating prosecutors, defense attorneys, probation officers, case managers and community-based treatment providers to address those underlying problems.

Offenders in speciality courts must voluntarily participate, abide by treatment and probationary rules and regularly appear before a judge to assess progress or the need for adjustments.

Mark Kammerer, director of treatment programs for the Cook County state's attorney's office, says while judges have more discretion in sentencing, they also have more information to go on.

"It's a completely nonadversarial system."

But the specialized courts do not offer a "get out of jail free" card. The judges can re-sentence offenders to prison if they break the rules.

The tailored courts also are not for everyone. State statute says an offender is not eligible for mental health court, for instance, if convicted of a violent crime



within the past 10 years. A good candidate for a mental health court, on the other hand, could include one who received treatment while incarcerated but who lacked a support system once released. Residential treatment could help meet essential needs while focusing on rehabilitation, Kammerer says, and offer flexibility if the person has a relapse.

But that requires community resources, as well as local, state and federal funds to support them.

"The volume in any of these programs is dependent on resources," he says. Cook County's mental health court had to suspend admissions for a couple of months because community-based services took a hit in state budget cuts this fall, he adds.

When available, speciality courts have proven to save money and to prevent repeat crimes.

According to Kammerer, the cost of caring for a mentally ill offender in Cook County drops from \$15,000 while in custody to \$1,400 during the first year of mental health court.

About 30 veterans have gone through Cook County's veterans' court since forming in February. The total number of arrests for all of them has dropped from more than 50 before they entered the program to one misdemeanor arrest since they entered the program.

Bethany Jaeger

## President receives Nobel Peace Prize

President Barack Obama's October Nobel Peace Prize win immediately generated debate among those who found the Norwegian Nobel Committee action too hasty.

Obama, who will travel to Oslo December 10 to accept the award, was honored "for his extraordinary efforts to strengthen international diplomacy and cooperation between peoples."



Obama, the third sitting U.S. president to receive the Nobel, won the honor just nine months into his presidency.

"The real question Americans are asking is, 'What has President Obama actually accomplished?'" said Michael Steele, chairman of the Republican National Committee, in a prepared statement.

"The question we have to ask is who has done the most in the previous year to enhance peace in the world," the Nobel committee chairman, Thorbjorn Jagland, said in Oslo after the announcement, according to the *New York Times*. "And who has done more than Barack Obama?"

In a release, the panel stated, "The committee has attached special importance to Obama's vision of and work for a world without nuclear weapons."

"Obama has as president created a new climate in international politics. Multilateral diplomacy has regained a central position, with emphasis on the role that the United Nations and other international institutions can play."

"Only very rarely has a person to the same extent as Obama captured the world's attention and given its people hope for a better future. His diplomacy is founded in the concept that those who are to lead the world must do so on the basis of values and attitudes that are shared by the majority of the world's population."

**For updated news see the  
Illinois Issues Web site at  
<http://illinoisissues.uis.edu>**

## IDOC reforms Tamms 'supermax' prison

The state's strongest maximum security prison has a new set of rules intended to give inmates incentives to improve their behavior so they can return to less restrictive facilities.

Illinois Department of Corrections Director Michael Randle issued a 10-step plan for reforming Tamms Correctional Center at the southwestern tip of the state.

Human rights advocates and a volunteer group known as Tamms Year Ten have argued that the "supermax" prison forces prolonged solitary confinement and offers poor treatment for mentally ill prisoners. However, they say the reforms are a good step toward mitigating the psychological damage caused by long-term isolation.

Tamms has been cited as reducing violence within the prison system. Male prisoners are sent there if they pose a threat to other inmates, themselves or prison staff. It was designed for short-term placement until inmates could return to the general prison population. The average stay is about five years, according to a report issued with Randle's 10-step plan.

One of the most significant reforms calls for a full mental health evaluation of all Tamms prisoners within 30 days of their arrival. Clinical staff also will make weekly rounds of all areas of the prison to detect whether inmates become suicidal.

Prisoners also will have a new hearing process that will allow them to rebut information that led them to be placed in Tamms, and they would be able to appeal their placement there. All hearings would be recorded.

Other changes would:

- Inform each inmate how long he would be expected to stay at Tamms and how he could earn privileges and eventually transfer to a less restrictive prison.

- Enhance incentives for good behavior, including earning the right to use the telephone or spend more time out of the cells.
- Begin offering General Educational Development testing.
- Implement congregate religious services for inmates.
- Rescind some of the restrictions on printed materials.
- Develop a plan to allow access to a "step down" program, which would help at-risk inmates transition from Tamms to the general prison population.
- Plan a media, legislative and public outreach program that includes a visit to Tamms.
- Re-examine the population of inmates having served extensive time at Tamms to see whether they are eligible to transfer out. Some have been at Tamms since it opened in 1998.

Laurie Jo Reynolds, organizer of the Tamms Year Ten grass-roots campaign, says the establishment of a transfer review hearing is significant. "Over half the prisoners who are there were not actually convicted of a crime in an Illinois prison, and many of them did not know the reasons for their placement. So this is a welcome reform."

But, she says, the reforms don't go as far as her group hoped in terms of providing a safeguard for mentally ill prisoners who may have not been properly diagnosed or treated.

She adds: "This list of 10 things could end up being really superficial or they could end up being profound, depending on how they're implemented. So we can only look forward to dialogue as we go forward."

Bethany Jaeger

## Chicago area buildings considered at risk

Actor Marlon Brando and Major League Baseball player Brett Butler once wandered the halls of Libertyville Township High School, built in 1917. The gymnasium, added to the structure in 1929, hosted regional boxing and was the site of a World War II bond rally featuring Helen Keller. But the structure is facing demolition, earning it a spot on Landmarks Illinois' "Chicagoland Watch List."

The list — a supplement to the "Ten Most Endangered Historic Places in Illinois," a statewide distinction announced each March — also includes three houses designed by Frank Lloyd Wright.

The high school building has not been used for class since 1999, when a new Libertyville High School was built. But Libertyville Community High School District 128 has plans to demolish the building to use the land for athletic fields and parking. The old school is now used as a community center, leased to the

Brainerd Community Center.

"The building should be saved for the important place it holds in the heritage of Libertyville and public education in central Lake County," says John Snow, president of the Brainerd Community Center. "The school offered higher education to young scholars in a time span that included two world wars and the Great Depression. Fully renovated, the Brainerd building offers an excellent location and large open spaces for a variety of community activities."

Mary Todric, director of communications for District 128, says, "We are very hopeful that the [village's Brainerd Preservation] Committee is successful in its five-year plan to raise the money for preservation efforts. However, the district must make plans in the event that the village does not raise the \$10 million to \$15 million it needs. One of the possibilities we have looked at is using the land for



*The Walser home in Chicago's Austin neighborhood was designed by Frank Lloyd Wright and is considered at risk.*

athletic fields that would benefit both the school district and community."

Another famous structure on the list is the Rose house and pavilion. James Speyer, an architect, museum curator and teacher at the Illinois Institute of Technology, designed the home in Highland Park. The pavilion, which stands over a ravine, was added to the home to display Rose's



## Up-to-date bridge information is available online

The Illinois Department of Transportation has released its inspection report and assessment of the condition of the state's bridges. Of the 7,700 state-maintained bridges, about 1,600 are rated as structurally deficient and another 1,600 are functionally obsolete. Deficient means a bridge is safe but can no longer hold its designed weight, and obsolete means a bridge does not meet current design standards. IDOT engineers determined 850 bridges need repairs or major reconstruction.

The department's program from fiscal year 2010 to fiscal year 2015 allocates \$2.5 billion for projects, 22 percent of which is devoted to bridges for replacement or rehabilitation. The department plans to build 55 new bridges in places where there isn't an existing structure. An additional 560 bridges are on the list for minor repairs.

"First and foremost, we do not jeopardize public safety," says Todd Ahrens, a bridge planning engineer with IDOT. "If there is any dangerous situation out there, we certainly react to it, and we either load-post — we limit the load that can go on the bridge — or we will close a bridge if it's unsafe."

Information on inspection findings is available online at <http://wrc.dot.il.gov/>

[bridgeinformation/main.aspx](http://wrc.dot.il.gov/bridgeinformation/main.aspx). The public can search for bridges by address, highway, county or structure number. Each is rated zero to 100, with zero a failing grade that requires a bridge closing and 100 perfect. Chicago's downtown Congress Parkway bridge over the south branch of the Chicago River, for instance, rated a low sufficiency score of 2.

Ahrens points out that is not a structural score. A sufficiency rating is required by the federal government to determine funding. A bridge with a rating of 50 to 80 is eligible for rehabilitation funds only; below 50 makes a bridge eligible for replacement. The Congress Parkway span, he says, was not designed to carry 160,000 vehicles a day on six lanes. So such functional items as lesser load limits, narrow lanes and no shoulders lower the sufficiency rating. The bridge is scheduled for major reconstruction next year.

Mike Pagano, dean of the University of Illinois at Chicago's urban planning college, says: "Repair and maintenance tends not to receive as high a priority on a year-to-year basis as it should. So we build bridges just fine; we just don't take care of them over their useful life because we haven't planned for the financial resources that are necessary for those

assets, in addition to all of the other operating costs of the state."

In August, Gov. Pat Quinn announced that Illinois was among the top states to quickly put American Recovery and Reinvestment Act money to work. "With the stimulus funds, we are able to advance 82 projects and bring them into the current year," says Ahrens. That is in addition to the 850 bridges in line for upgrades.

"It's been quite an effort to get the Web site [with the inspection report] up and going," says Ralph Anderson, the department's chief of bridges and structures. "We had a lot of security issues."

Anderson says after 9/11, the federal Department of Homeland Security didn't want the transportation department to make any records available. "But Gov. Quinn said we're going to find a way to get some of this information out there." Anderson says the information goes to the federal government, which gives it out to the public, and therefore the Web site is not an infringement of the national security effort.

He says the department updates the public information daily. "That makes it more accurate, more timely."

*Beverley Scobell,*

*Melissa Weissert contributing*



*The Church of the Resurrection in West Chicago made Landmarks Illinois' Chicagoland Watch List this year.*

classic car collection. The pavilion appeared in a scene of John Hughes' 1986 film *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*. The house, while still in excellent condition, has been vacant since early 2009, and several people have made inquiries about demolishing the home.

Other structures on the list include three Frank Lloyd Wright houses: the



*The former Libertyville High School, which is now known as the Brauerd Community Center, is being considered for demolition.*

J.J. Walser house in Chicago, the William F. Ross house in Glencoe and the William J. VanderKloot bungalow in Lake Bluff. The Walser house and the VanderKloot bungalow are both privately owned but need considerable maintenance. The Ross house has been vacant for two years and has fallen into disrepair.

The Church of the Resurrection, a West

Chicago Episcopal church designed by Edward Dart, a Chicago architect of modern design, also made the list. The South Side Masonic Temple in Chicago, the Cornelius Field house in Highland Park, the Lincoln-Fullerton streetscape in Chicago, Alden Road in McHenry County and the Colony at the Chicago Golf Club in Wheaton, which consists of 23 summer cottages and estates on the oldest 18-hole golf course in the country, complete the list.

Landmarks Illinois chose structures based on geographic and design diversity, as well as where attention and education can do the most good. "Ideally, we would like all of these buildings saved," says Jim Peters, president of the organization. "Most of these buildings are not in immediate danger, but this list makes the public aware of these structures so they can step in and help."

*Melissa Weissert*



## BRIEFLY

### Wildlife center may close

The Treehouse Wildlife Center, a nonprofit in southwestern Illinois dedicated to the care of injured and orphaned wildlife, is in a race against time. The center's lease has expired, and it lacks the funds to build at a new location. By the end of the year, the center may close.

In Brighton in Macoupin County, the wildlife center began 30 years ago as a storeroom with three outdoor cages but has evolved into a 19-acre facility with 36 cages and a hospital building. "We are the only center in this area. If we close, that leaves about 500 displaced animals each year which will have nowhere else to go. Vets are not allowed to take in wildlife except for emergency care, and if people try to care for the animals themselves, it can become dangerous," says Lynn Schreiber, president of the wildlife center. "If we don't get the funding by the end of the year, we will likely close, and it will be a shame."

For the past five years, the organization has been trying to find \$250,000 to relocate and build a new hospital and education center, as well as cage complexes. Ten acres was donated to the center through a land trust. However, Schreiber estimates that only a quarter of the needed funds have been raised. The organization operates on membership and outreach program fees, donations, fundraisers and grants. Though the federal government pays the center for caring for endangered species, Treehouse receives no other federal or state funding.

"Even if we didn't lose our lease, it is critical for us to move. We only have a little building, and it can't sustain the nearly 500 animals that we take in each year. It wasn't built with the intent of having this many animals," says Schreiber. "It's just literally falling apart."

The center, which is primarily staffed by volunteers, is home to a variety of wildlife, including bobcats, foxes, coyotes, pelicans, falcons and eagles. The center also houses some permanent residents that cannot be released because of severe injuries. Those animals serve as foster parents to orphaned animals or are used in educational outreach programs that teach the value of wildlife to the public.

Treehouse is also home to three endangered barn owls, says Schreiber. One barn owl was injured when it was knocked from a tree that was being cut down; five others perished. "These owls are endangered in Illinois mainly because their habitats are being destroyed." Dr. Paul Myer, a veterinarian at Hawthorne Animal Hospital in Glen Carbon, already sees a lot of people bringing in wildlife, especially birds, to his clinic. "At least with Treehouse Wildlife Center, we have somewhere to recommend. If they close, the closest is Missouri or Peoria, and that's quite a jog for people."

Melissa Weissert



*The owl Mocha is used in outreach programs by the center.*

Photographs by Adele Moore, courtesy of the Treehouse Wildlife Center



*This bobcat named Tigger is a permanent resident of Treehouse Wildlife Center.*



*Dr. Paul Myer performs surgery on a bald eagle's wing.*



*Volunteers wash a waterfowl after an oil spill in the Mississippi River.*



## U of I prof wins genius grant for biomedical research



**John Rogers**

A University of Illinois materials science professor was named one of 24 winners of this year's so-called genius grant, a \$500,000 no-strings-attached award given by the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation "to individuals who have shown exceptional creativity in their work and the promise to do more."

John Rogers is the Lee J. Flory-Founder Chair in Engineering Innovation professor in the Department of Materials Science and Engineering at Urbana-Champaign. He says he plans to take his prize money and "plow it right back in" to

his work developing flexible electronic devices.

"The study of biointerfaces and bio-compatible devices is pretty interesting," says Rogers. "This is an area that has been studied for decades, but not a lot of progress has been made on understanding the fundamental aspects of what happens when you integrate a man-made device with the body."

Silicon, for instance, is a hard material used for supporting integrated circuits. By reducing it to nanoscale thinness — one million times thinner than a silicon wafer — it becomes flexible.

"Just as a tree is hard but paper is flexible, both made of the same material, silicon can have both properties also."

Working with the University of Pennsylvania medical school, Rogers' group of researchers has unpublished findings of animal tests that show that thin tapes of electronics can be laminated onto muscle tissue, such as the heart, to monitor electrical activity. In cases of arrhythmia when the heart doesn't beat properly, the device could correct the abnormal

electrical impulses.

Rogers also is working with doctors at Penn to apply the electrical tape to the surface of the brain to measure electrical activity. That information may lead to predicting or even eliminating epileptic seizures in patients.

Rogers also is looking at devices that can mount on the skin. "We can provide a kind of health monitoring functionality — monitor pulse rate, hydration, temperature — but in the form of ultrathin — essentially like kids' electronic tattoos — devices that are that thin and that conformal to be invisible."

Rogers' earlier work includes inventions of consumer electronics, such as the first electronic-eye cameras, flexible LED displays and stretchable integrated circuits.

The MacArthur announcement summed up his achievements this way: "Through his basic research in nanotechnology, chemical engineering and applied physics, Rogers is building the foundation for a revolution in the manufacture of industrial, consumer and biocompatible electronics."

*Beverly Scobell*

## 2009 SAMUEL K. GOVE LEGISLATIVE INTERNSHIP PROGRAM INDUCTEES ANNOUNCED

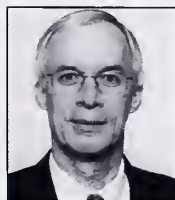
The Samuel K. Gove Illinois Legislative Internship Hall of Fame will honor five individuals who have served as legislative interns at the state Capitol. John Day, Claire B. Eberle, Stephen R. Pacey, Lee J. Schwartz and Gretchen A. Winter will be inducted during a ceremony at the Executive Mansion on Monday, November 16. Inductees are selected based on their contributions to Illinois and its citizens. The Hall of Fame, sponsored by *Illinois Issues*, is also recognition of the important role public service internships play in developing public sector leadership. The event will begin at 5:30 p.m. on November 16, with a reception followed by the induction ceremony. Tickets are \$60 per person. For information on attending, call 217-206-6084 or go to the web site, <http://illinoisissues.uis.edu>.



**John Day** retired in 2003 as assistant executive director at Illinois' Teachers Retirement System (TRS) after 10 years with the system. Prior to employment with TRS, he was executive director of the Legislative Audit Commission, worked with the Senate Democratic staff and was a legislative intern from 1970-71. Day is a former resident of Rochester.



**Claire Eberle** is deputy director of the Joint Committee on Administrative Rules (JCAR) for the Illinois General Assembly. She has been with JCAR since 1986, previously serving on the Senate president's staff from 1976 to 1978. She was a member of the legislative intern class of 1975. Eberle resides in Springfield.



**Stephen Pacey** has served as Ford County's resident circuit judge since 1996. Previously, he was a commissioner with the Illinois Court of Claims and a public defender for Ford County.

A lifelong Paxton resident, Pacey spent 22 years in private legal practice. He was a member of the 1970 legislative intern class.

**Lee Schwartz** (photo unavailable) was a Chicago attorney in private practice at the time of his death in 2002. A member of the legislative intern class of 1966, he was described as an expert on the state Constitution. He served as legal counsel to Jack Touhy, then-speaker of the House, and former state Senate Minority Leader Thomas Arthur "Art" McGloin. He made the transition to Chicago politics, where he served in similar positions for Chicago Mayors Richard J. Daley, Michael Bilandic and Harold Washington.



**Gretchen Winter** has been the executive director of the Center for Professional Responsibility in Business and Society in the College of Business of the University of Illinois since 2007. The Center is located in Chicago. A member of the 1979 intern class, she has more than 25 years of law firm, public sector and corporate experience and frequently speaks on the topics of professional responsibility, business ethics, compliance, governance, sustainability and corporate social responsibility.



## BRIEFLY

### Fungus threatens bat population

The state Department of Natural Resources will guide a film crew through southern Illinois caves this winter to record the state's bats for "historical purposes" because in a couple of years, thousands could die from a fungus that attacks them while they hibernate.

"It could be sooner," says Joe Kath, endangered species manager at the department.

Illinois biologists have cause for alarm. The fungus, which University of Wisconsin scientists have described as a new species, causes white-nose syndrome, so called because of a white, fuzzy growth that appears around bats' muzzles and down their wings.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife scientists estimate more than a million bats have died since the fungus was discovered on dead bats in a New York cave in 2006. White-nose syndrome has infected six species of insect-eating bats, causing declines approaching 100 percent in some populations. It has spread through nine north-eastern and southern states and as far west as Pennsylvania and West Virginia. Kath says computer models project the decimation of bat populations in Ohio and Kentucky next, followed closely by Indiana and Illinois, arcing into Wisconsin, Iowa and Mississippi.

Illinois is home to the federally and state-endangered Indiana bat and gray bat, along with 10 other species of bats. "If the spread of WNS [white-nose syndrome] is not slowed or halted, further losses could lead to the extinction of entire species and could more than quadruple those that are federally listed as endangered in the U.S.," according to a statement released in May by scientists attending a conference sponsored by Bat Conservation International in Austin, Texas.

In the northeast, three species of bats are already thought to be extinct, or soon will be. The loss of so many insect-eating species will have "unprecedented consequences on ecosystem health throughout North America, with unknown economic consequences," according to the conference report.

Bats, the only mammal that can fly, hunt at night, feeding exclusively on insects. In one night, a single bat may eat 3,000 insects, including corn borer and cutworm moths that attack corn and soybean plants and mosquitoes that carry such diseases as the West Nile virus. Bat Conservation International estimates the number of insects consumed annually by one million little brown myotis bats is equivalent to 694 tons. Without bats, farmers will have to apply much more pesticide.

The fish and wildlife service has closed caves it supervises, but Kath says Illinois has not yet closed caves it oversees. Most of the state's caves that serve as hibernacula, the places chosen by bats to hibernate for the winter, are in the far southern counties of Alexander and Union, as well as some along the Mississippi River bluffs.

Kath and others will monitor Illinois' bat populations during winter hibernation to watch for signs of white-nose syndrome, which they believe kills the bats by causing

Photograph by Marvin Moriarty, courtesy of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service



*Little brown bat with white-nose syndrome*

them to awaken before winter is over, and they starve from lack of food. Kath is concerned about the disturbance a film crew will cause.

However, he says, "my colleagues and I believe a minimal disturbance is worth documenting what we have — before it's all gone."

*Beverley Scobell*

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# Democracy by lottery

Illinois is unique in how it selects the party that controls the political redistricting process. Voters might want to play more of a role this time around

by Bethany Jaeger

The Illinois General Assembly has one year and seven months to meet a constitutional deadline it has failed to meet each of the past three decades. But in 2011, the process of redistricting — redrawing the state's congressional and legislative maps — could be different.

Headlines leading up to the 2011 redistricting process are likely to be that Illinois is expected to lose at least one congressional seat next year, maybe even two if not all residents are counted. But other changes will affect the way Illinois settles on a new map.

First, the population is shifting and expanding, partially from immigration trends nationwide. And more detailed data than ever will be available when the U.S. Census Bureau releases 2010 population estimates to the states, as required by April 2011.

Second, Illinois' political circumstances have changed. Democrats control both chambers of the General Assembly and, at least for another year, the governor's office. That increases the chance — but does not guarantee — that a redistricting plan could be in place before the June 30, 2011, deadline.

Last, Illinois legislators won't be the only ones submitting redistricting plans. They'll have at least some competition from the public.

The consequences are many.

The way the congressional and legislative maps look not only determines the political makeup of the state's delegations, but it also determines the distribution of government funding and goes hand-in-hand with the policy decisions made by the political party in power.

The League of Women Voters of Illinois is one of the most vocal proponents of change.

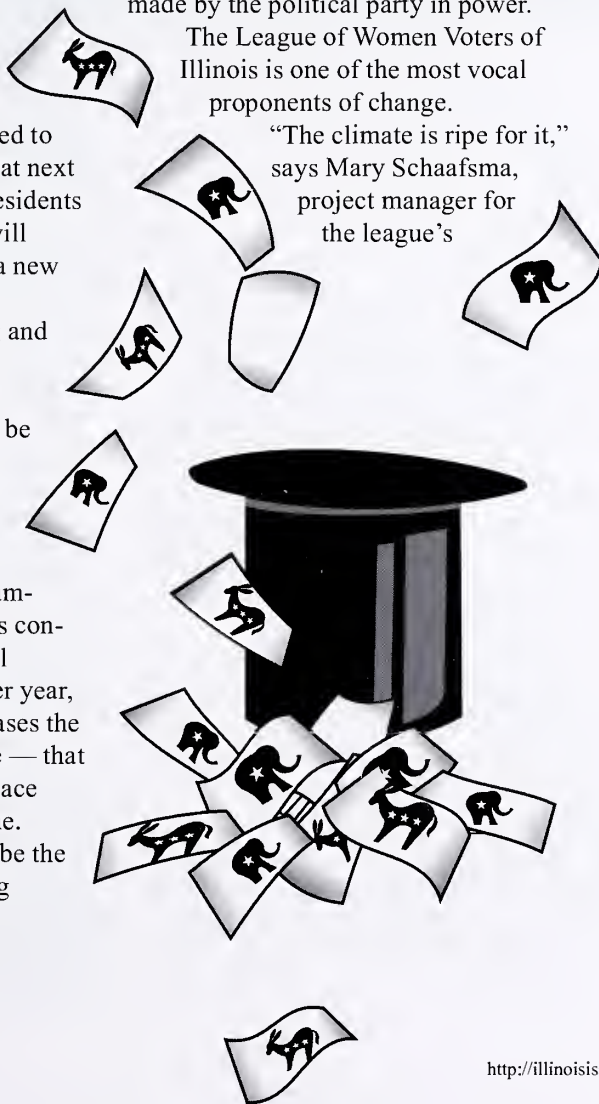
"The climate is ripe for it," says Mary Schaafsma, project manager for the league's

Census 2010 campaign and redistricting reform project. "People are frustrated with the government, and if we can create a good public education campaign that really helps people understand — both individual citizens and residents of Illinois [and] groups that depend on state funding — they will hopefully appreciate the relationship between our inability to get good public policy through the legislature and the way in which the state is redistricted after each census."

The process starts with the U.S. Census Bureau, which reapportions the 435 seats in the U.S. House of Representatives based on the new population estimates.

Then, per the 1970 Illinois Constitution, the General Assembly must redraw the congressional and legislative maps. Each state does it differently and sets its own priorities.

The caveat for redistricting purposes, however, is that the U.S. Census counts voting age, ethnicity and language — not citizenship. That means legislators will be considering blocks of ethnicities or blocks of people who are 18 and older, but they won't know in time for the 2011 mapmaking process whether they are citizens who can actually vote, according to Peter Wattson, a national redistricting expert and secretary and counsel for the Minnesota state Senate.





*Brad McMillan, executive director of the Institute for Principled Leadership in Public Service at Bradley University, explains Illinois' oddly shaped districts during a Statehouse news conference last spring.*

That could be particularly applicable in the suburbs of Chicago. During an Illinois Senate hearing in the summer, Wattson said minorities have polarized themselves by moving out to the suburbs, while partisan groups have compacted themselves together. So candidates are getting elected from more polarized districts.

That trend combines with Illinois' recent history of allowing one political party to control the entire mapmaking process. Legislative leaders tend to draw maps that favor their political parties and, for the most part, districts that protect incumbents.

It started after Illinois adopted its 1970 Constitution, creating a unique tie-breaking provision with unintended consequences. Because legislative leaders have hit a stalemate in three out of four redistricting cycles, they by default have left control of the mapmaking process to chance. The tie-breaking system has included the secretary of state pulling a name out of a replica of Abraham Lincoln's stovepipe hat or, in another

instance, a fishbowl. The name of the Democrat or Republican drawn has determined which party controls the process: Democrats were picked in 1981, Republicans in 1991 and Democrats in 2001.

Tim Storey, a senior fellow in legislative management with the National Conference of State Legislatures, says Illinois is unique in its random selection, but that may not be a good thing. "It just seems like the stakes are too high to leave it to chance, that there ought to be more of a process that's transparent, that involves all parties being able to engage in the process."

Cynthia Canary, director of the Illinois Campaign for Political Reform, agrees and says the only time legislative redistricting plans are parsed out in public is when they're challenged in court. "This notion that you draw a name out of Lincoln's hat and then go back into a back room with the computer and draw the map, [it's] completely out of view because it's not even a map that is up for negotiation."

## Redistricting timeline

**December 31, 2010** — U.S. Census submits data to the president.

**April 1, 2011** — Census data must be submitted to the states.

**June 30, 2011** — Illinois deadline for approving a legislatively drawn map.

**July 10, 2011** — If the legislature misses the deadline, an eight-member commission is formed.

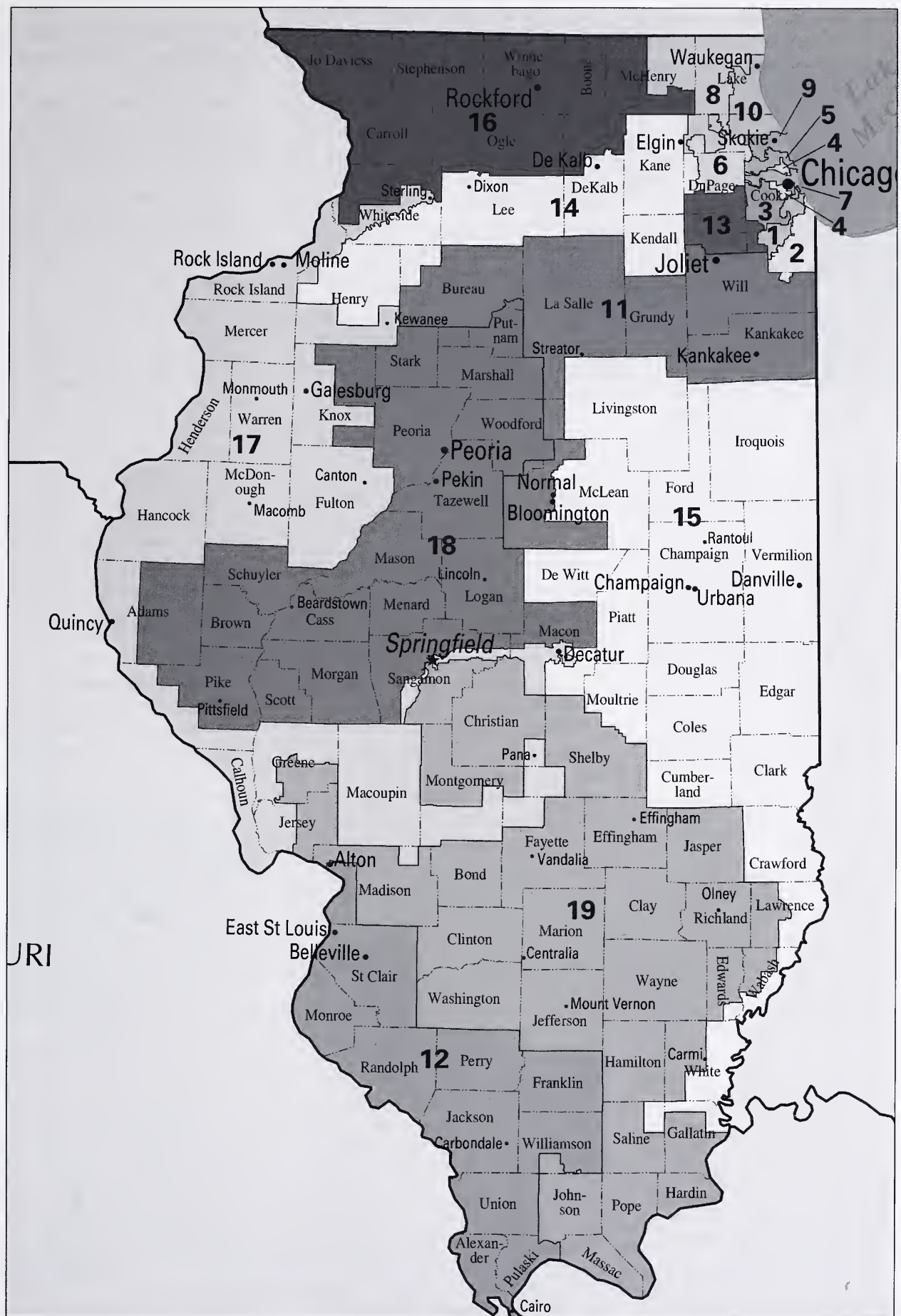
**August 10, 2011** — Commission deadline for filing a plan with the secretary of state.

**September 1, 2011** — If the commission misses its deadline, the Illinois Supreme Court submits names of two people from different political parties to the secretary of state.

**September 5, 2011** — Secretary of state draws one of the names out of a hat; that person becomes the ninth and majority member of the commission.

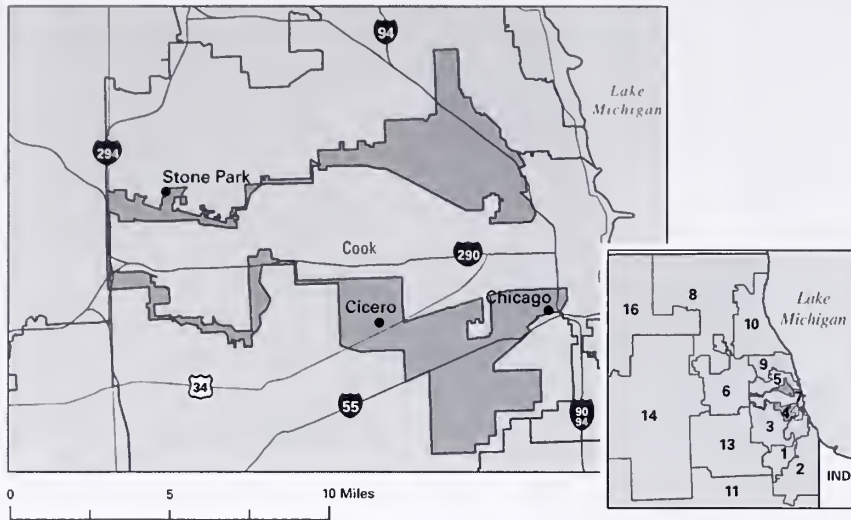
**October 5, 2011** — Nine-member commission deadline for submitting a plan to the secretary of state with approval of at least five members.





*Illinois' congressional districts that look like salamanders as opposed to rectangles are under scrutiny.*

## Congressional District 4



*Illinois' 4th Congressional District is nationally known for resembling a pair of earmuffs.*

The approach has resulted in politicians picking their voters rather than the other way around, says John Jackson, a political scientist and visiting professor at the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

Without competitive elections, "it is almost impossible for the people to hold their rulers accountable and for public opinion to play much role in the making of public policy," he wrote in a 2005 paper for the institute.

Furthermore, he recently added, the lack of competitive races polarizes the General Assembly. "You don't get enough people that are willing to be somewhere in between and work on the moderating influences of having to negotiate and give and take as the legislative process demands."

**What's different this** year leading up to the redistricting cycle is that Democrats control the Illinois House, Senate and governor's office. While the 2010 elections will determine whether Democrats will retain control of the governor's office, Canary says the Democratic majority could meet its constitutional deadline and avoid picking a name out of a hat.

"I'm fairly certain that the Democrats have the votes to [approve] their map," she says.

But it will be up to the next governor, whether Democratic or Republican, to sign it into law.

The solid Democratic majority also doesn't guarantee more public input, says Kent Redfield, a political scientist at the University of Illinois Springfield.

"We're going to have hearings, we're going to have a commission. We may even have a couple of constitutional amendments that will get discussed in committees. But as long as the Democrats believe that they can control the process and get a map into law by passing it and having a Democratic governor sign it, then they're not going to give up control of the process."

House Speaker Michael Madigan, who has held that position since 1983, other than for two years in the mid-'90s, says the current process works.

"I think that the redistricting worked real well in the '90s," he said in August. "It showed that it does work because, you recall, in 1991, the Republicans drew the lines. And then House Democrats won four or five elections. That's something Tom Cross doesn't talk about."

Tom Cross is House Republican leader. He and Senate Republican Leader Christine Radogno sent a letter to the governor in August requesting a special legislative session to debate redistricting reforms.

"We believe nothing is more critical to achieving real, systemic reform than end-

ing the partisan political gerrymandering of legislative and congressional districts," they wrote.

Patty Schuh, spokeswoman for the Senate Republicans, said the caucus supports redistricting reforms recommended by Quinn's Illinois Reform Commission.

The recommendations include creating independent advisory committees and consultants to produce three separate maps: one for the Illinois House districts, one for the Senate and one for congressional districts. Public hearings would precede a vote by the Illinois General Assembly. The process would have judicial oversight, and computer software would help draw the maps to ensure minority representation.

The longstanding joke — although it's based on an actual scenario — is that Springfield residents can play a game of golf on a course that runs through three different congressional districts.

Another nationally renowned map depicts the 4th Congressional District drawn in 1992, aptly named the "earmuff" district for its two circular ear-pieces that were connected by an arched headband. It was intentionally drawn to congregate Hispanic voters into one district with a 64 percent majority. It wrapped around a predominantly African-American neighborhood.

The plan was challenged in court as an unconstitutional "racial gerrymander," where lines were intentionally drawn to consolidate a specific racial group. While the federal court agreed that it did constitute racial gerrymandering, it decided the shape was justified as a way to ensure Hispanic voters had equal opportunity to elect the candidate of their choice without splitting the neighboring African-American district.

"The earmuff district is famous because it is one of the very few examples where a court has said, 'Yes, this is potentially a problem under the Constitution, but compliance with the Voting Rights Act saves it,'" says Nate Persily, a law professor at Columbia Law School.

The Illinois Constitution requires that congressional and legislative districts be "compact, contiguous and substantially equal in population." But states also have to abide by the federal Voting Rights Act, designed to secure adequate representation of racial and language minorities.



Iowa, which has a unique redistricting system, draws three separate maps for the state House, Senate and congressional delegation, as well. But legislative staff draw the maps and cannot look at so-called political data, including voting results, party registration or incumbents' addresses.

"These plans are drawn only using the census data in Iowa," says Storey of the National Conference of State Legislatures.

Iowa, however, is also different for having a relatively low minority population. According to Storey, in the 2000 round of redistricting, Iowa's minority population was less than 5 percent, which included Latino and African-American voters.

"It would be much more challenging in a large minority population state to use the Iowa model because you have to be so concerned about the Voting Rights Act," Storey says.

That concern includes Illinois, says Sen. Kwame Raoul, a Chicago Democrat chairing the Senate hearings throughout the state.

**Members of the public** are expected to have a new way to participate in 2011.

The Institute of Government and Pub-

lic Affairs at the University of Illinois is in the beginning stages of coordinating a public contest to redraw the political maps. It would be similar to a contest conducted in Ohio last year.

Robert Rich, executive director of the Illinois institute, says anyone interested will be able to learn the constitutional requirements for redistricting and use special software to draw the maps. The contest is part of the institution's multifaceted effort to educate the public and research what works in other states.

But the contest, he says, could draw attention to the thought: "Hey, there may be some alternative ways of doing this. And guess what. You can have a major impact on how districts look just by changing different assumptions."

Illinois Rep. Mike Fortner, a West Chicago Republican, did that in Ohio's public contest. He submitted one of the top three plans for that state's congressional map. Although it was a test run based on 2000 data, Fortner says, "One thing that they found was that every one of the publicly submitted plans beat the score of the map that was actually approved by the Ohio legislature."

The Ohio secretary of state sponsored the contest and provided access to geographic information systems, or GIS, mapping software on the Ohio State

University's Internet server. Each user applied in advance and got a secure account. They had to follow certain criteria, such as drawing compact districts.

Fortner's map for Ohio produced rectangular districts and would have resulted in nine Republicans, eight Democrats and one virtual tie.

"Whether you have a commission, whether you have a special master, everybody brings their own personal biases," Fortner says. "Rather than try to find the mythical, neutral, unbiased mechanisms, let's just admit that everyone's got biases. Let the biases out there and then rely on the scoring system to sort out the best plan."

Storey says public versions could come into play if state-drawn plans are taken to court.

"There's no doubt in my mind that that may be the biggest change from 10 years ago. There will be far more public involvement in actually drawing legitimate plans as alternatives."

Canary says Illinois citizens, once educated about the importance of redistricting, hold the key for reform.

"I think that the legislature may be open to a bit more transparency and a few tweaks, but I don't think that they have an interest in letting go of their control of the process." □

## Commission states

**California** is the newest state to use a commission to draw its legislative map, and it's a unique but untested system.

Generated by a voter initiative to change California's constitution, it requires a supermajority of votes — 9 out of 14 — to approve a new map. Those nine have to include three from the Democratic group, three from the Republican group and three from the unaffiliated group.

In the case of a stalemate, the state Supreme Court appoints a so-called special master to draw a map based on the same criteria used by the legislature.

At least one state every decade has transitioned to using a commission rather than the legislative process to redraw their congressional or legislative maps, according to Tim Storey, senior fellow in legislative management with the National Conference of State Legislatures based in Denver.

In the 2011 cycle, 13 states will use redistricting commissions. Storey says while the assumption is that commissions take politics out of the process, there's great diversity in the way those bodies are formed.

"Some of the commissions are in fact more partisan than even the legislative process," Storey says.

Here are a few examples:

In **Missouri**, the governor appoints all the commissioners.

**New Jersey** legislative leaders make the appointments.

**Arkansas** uses only three commissioners: the governor, the secretary of state and the attorney general.

**Illinois** only uses a commission as a back-up if the legislature's plan fails to receive the governor's approval by June 30. It comprises four Democrats and four Republicans, including some legislators. If that commission fails to agree on a redistricting plan, then the secretary of state draws a name out of a hat to determine which political party holds a majority on the commission and, therefore, draws the new map.

Several proposals for change have been introduced in the Illinois legislature, including a constitutional amendment, **House Joint Resolution 44**. It would allow the House and Senate to draw their own legislative maps and require a three-fifths majority in each chamber, ensuring a bipartisan outcome. If that process failed, the state Supreme Court would appoint a special master to draw the map based on the same criteria.

That constitutional amendment advanced in the House in 2008 but stalled in the Senate under then-President Emil Jones Jr.

Bethany Jaeger

# Black says he won't be back

After nearly a quarter century as one of the General Assembly's most colorful and quotable characters, Rep. Bill Black is moving on

by Kurt Erickson

This time it's real.



*State Rep. William B. Black*

Really.

State Rep. William "Bill" Black, the loud-mouthed, big-hearted, sometimes-pain-in-the-rear lawmaker, says he really is quitting this time.

Really.

Come January 2010, one of the most visible, vocal and hardworking members of the legislature says he will be staying home when the new General Assembly is sworn in.

"This is irrefutable, irreversible," Black says. "I've given my solemn pledge to my wife and my dog, not necessarily in that order."

Black, a Danville Republican, is one of the highest profile members of the Illinois House, mainly because he has served as his party's floor leader since 1991.

In that role, Black is often the guy you hear talking the most when the General Assembly is in session. His job — except for two years in the mid-1990s when Democrats were in the minority — is to frame the debate for his fellow Republicans.

And he's been good at it, mixing often caustic attacks on the party in control with a down home sense of humor that shows a keen understanding of the complicated rules that govern the workings of the legislature.

Since 1991, the only other person to serve as floor leader was state Rep. Lou Lang of Skokie, who was the designated talker during the two years Democrats were in the minority from 1995 to 1996.

Lang says Black does the job "exceedingly well."

"To be heard in the minority, you've sometimes got to be over the top," Lang says. "I recall being the same way."

"There's a method to his madness," says House Minority Leader Tom Cross, an Oswego Republican who kept Black on as floor leader when Cross took over from his predecessor, Lee Daniels, in 2003.

Take an incident from a floor debate in 2001. A visibly frustrated Black tried to knock down a colleague's argument, using his trademark wit.

"This is more baloney than Oscar Mayer could slice in six months," he barked.

And so, after nearly a quarter century as one of the General Assembly's most

colorful and quotable characters, Black is moving on.

Gone will be his familiar rants, his bombastic tirades and his ever-present contrarian monologues that have entertained visitors to the House galleries and vexed his weary colleagues.

"I know some people have probably sat in the House gallery and looked down at me and said, 'My God, the guy must be nuts,'" Black acknowledges.

That only partly explains some of the skepticism about his decision to step down.

In 2007, he issued a press release under the banner: "Black announces decision to retire from Illinois House in 2009."

That one-page announcement is tacked to a wall in the Statehouse pressroom.

Next to it is another press release, from April 2008, headlined, "Black will be on November ballot."

It wasn't the first time he threatened to leave. Some veteran members of the Statehouse press corps have even unofficially banned their underlings from writing stories about Black stepping down.

Despite numerous walkouts and talk of an imminent departure in the past, he really did try to leave in 2007. His dalliance with quitting was sidetracked when his chosen successor pulled out of the race. Those previous threats to walk away, he said, were "dramatic flair" partly because of his role as floor leader.

"Sometimes you have to do things for effect," Black says.



Black says the story of his impending departure can now be written.

"It's time. I have no intention of running. I can't envision a scenario in which that would happen," Black says. "I didn't hit a single parade on Labor Day. I didn't have a desire to get candy and throw it to the neighborhood kids."

Black arrived in Springfield in 1986, having followed his father — a heating and air conditioning contractor — into public service.

Black was an administrator at Danville Area Community College in the 1970s and then joined the Vermilion County Board, eventually serving two years as chairman.

His 1,500-vote victory margin in his first House race came despite the Danville area being largely controlled locally by Democratic officeholders. By 1994, he was entrenched, beating his opponent with 78 percent of the vote.

It was in 1991 when Black's role as floor leader began to take shape. Daniels, the House minority leader from Elmhurst, was looking for someone to get GOP members rolling when legislation was being debated on the floor.

Through a combination of folksy speeches, thorough research of issues and the ability to pin down opponents with his verbal skills, Black quickly became one of the better-known members of the 118-member House.

In 2001, he was questioning a fellow lawmaker about legislation affecting the state's toll highway system. His colleague wasn't answering with "yes" or "no" questions.

Black's response: "When he gives me some double-barreled answer that goes on for 90 seconds, my antenna goes up."

During another debate, Black believed the sponsor of a bill wasn't being clear about the purpose of the legislation.

"I'm just a poor ol' downstater," Black said. "You're going to have to put the hay down where the goats can eat it."

His colleagues marvel at Black's work ethic and his ability to land body blows on opponents.

"Bill Black doesn't back down from anything," says state Rep. Roger Eddy, a Hutsonville Republican. "He's an example of how you're supposed to approach the job."



*Retiring state Rep. Bill Black at work earlier this year*

Black says he had a number of role models when it came to defining how he would serve as floor leader.

Chief among them is Senate President John Cullerton, a Chicago Democrat who served in the House with Black.

"He had a good sense of humor. I decided early on that I would try to use that same approach," Black says.

Rather than just suggesting others vote "no" on an issue, Black routinely takes it one step further. "This smells like yesterday's fish sandwich. This thing stinks," Black said during a 1998 debate.

Sometimes things have gotten out of hand.

His 1992 rumble with former state Rep. Terry Parke, a fellow Republican from Hoffman Estates, remains legendary in Statehouse lore. The two had to be pulled apart during one heated debate on the House floor.

And he's still known on the floor as the guy who has thrown a rule book and a box of tissues at the speaker's podium. It was only a quick-thinking Republican staffer who stopped Black from follow-

ing through on his intent to throw a water bottle toward the front of the chamber.

"As God as my witness, I didn't think that box of tissues would have flown anywhere near that far," Black says.

House Majority Leader Barbara Flynn Currie, a Chicago Democrat who has often locked horns with Black, says the House will be "less colorful" when Black makes his exit.

"He's kind of a lovable curmudgeon," she says.

For all of his bluster and long-winded speeches, Black has occasionally spoken up on issues that he didn't support.

His job as floor leader is to set the tone of the debate, regardless of whether he believes in the issue. And he has not always agreed with his fellow Republican lawmakers.

In 1997, he was a co-sponsor of an income tax hike being pushed by former Gov. Jim Edgar. He believed it would serve as a fairer way to finance public schools, especially in his hometown which has been devastated by an exodus

of manufacturing jobs, leaving local property values — the biggest factor in public school funding — reeling.

“There were some uncomfortable moments in the Republican caucus,” Black said. “The conservative wing of my party threatened me with instant death.”

He also supported extending a law that offers help to people having trouble making their utility payments.

He backed the idea despite Republican opposition because of the hard economic times in his district. The region has lost 10,000 residents in the past two decades.

“People I went to high school with need help. You have to be somewhat reflective of your district,” he says.

At the same time, he brought a Republican free enterprise belief system to the argument about banning smoking in public places.

Although he is a staunch nonsmoker, he says it was wrong for state government to tell small business owners that they could not allow smoking in their places of business.

“It’s not the business of the state to tell business owners how to run their businesses,” Black says.

Many have marveled at Black’s energy level. On long session days, while other lawmakers scan the Internet on their state-issued laptop computers or take multiple breaks for food, Black has been there on the floor, using a combination of institutional knowledge and theatrical capability to keep the debate lively.

“I would be exhausted doing what he’s done,” Eddy says.

Indeed, Black’s health has been a constant source of concern for himself and his colleagues.

In 1990, for example, he was hospitalized for six weeks with viral pneumonia. In 1994, he suffered from exhaustion. In August 2005 he canceled a trip to the Republican National Convention because of a blood clot. In April 2005, he had more health problems.

During a lengthy session night a few years back, he collapsed on the House floor. Colleagues rushed to his side to help. It wasn’t immediately clear to observers what had happened, but alarm bells went off when he was wheeled out of the Statehouse on a gurney, leaving many to wonder if he’d be back.

Turns out, he’d wrenched his back.

“That was some kind of pain,” he says.

On another session day, Black was in a committee room when one of the chairs broke. He tumbled to the ground and broke two ribs. One of his lungs had to be re-inflated.

Though he’s mainly referring to the food, Black points to Springfield and says, “That’s not a healthy lifestyle over there.”

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***“It’s time. I have no intention of running. I can’t envision a scenario in which that would happen. I didn’t hit a single parade on Labor Day. I didn’t have a desire to get candy and throw it to the neighborhood kids.”***

**— State Rep. William  
“Bill” Black**

For outside observers, it’s not a hard mental transition to see his frequent rants and blow-ups on the floor as being linked to his health problems. Anyone who comes off as that stressed out is bound to literally blow a gasket.

But Black has lived most of his adult life under the specter of health problems.

In 1963, at the age of 21, all of his large intestine was removed because of colitis. He underwent an ileostomy, which means his body’s internal waste is ducted out through a tube into a bag.

Although Black acknowledges he’s not getting any younger, he says the health problems are not the primary reason he’s leaving.

“I’m not going to use that as a crutch,” he says. Rather, Black says he knew it was time for him to go when he realized he wasn’t spending as much time researching legislation as he’d done in the past.

He says his desire to get out began when gridlock among Democrats who controlled the legislative and executive branch began to take hold.

Though he lauds House Speaker Michael Madigan, a Chicago Democrat, as a master tactician, the fighting between the speaker and former Gov. Rod Blagojevich began breeding cynicism.

“The last six years have to have been some of the most frustrating years in the history of the General Assembly,” Black says. “I think it has really worn down people I respect.”

Rather than arrive early and pore over staff analyses of legislation, Black says he was less inclined to put in the time because much of what was happening in floor debate was being dictated by the fighting between Blagojevich and Madigan.

“If you can’t really invest the time, it’s time to let someone with more resources take a shot,” Black says.

If Republicans remain in the minority after the 2010 elections, it remains unclear who will assume Black’s role.

Eddy, for one, was honored to know Black mentioned his name as a potential successor. Other Republicans on the potential short list include state Rep. Mike Bost of Murphysboro and Rep. Tim Schmitz of Batavia.

Cross hinted that a single person may not be able to fill the void.

“It may be one. It may be two,” Cross says.

“Those shoes are huge,” Eddy adds.

As he prepares to leave Springfield after nearly a quarter century in office, Black says he will look fondly around his district at some of the projects he has been able to bring home to the communities in east-central Illinois.

From improving the fire department in Oakwood to helping small towns replace aging water towers, Black says he is proud of the service he has provided to the area.

And he’s proud of having been able to steer the debate in Springfield — win or lose.

“I’ve tried to understand the issues. I’ve tried to be rational. And I think I’ve done some good things,” Black says.

And, most important, “I’ve survived.” □

*Kurt Erickson is Statehouse bureau chief for Lee Enterprises.*





# The new economy

When the recession eases, Illinoisans may find a different financial landscape

by Marcia Frellick

**B**uz Hoffman, like most other homebuilders, didn't see the full force of this recession coming.

Just three years after sales peaked at \$415 million for the private company he founded, Lakewood Homes in Hoffman Estates, sales plummeted to \$68 million in 2008, according to *Builder* magazine rankings.

"I'm not even going to call it a recession — it's a full-blown depression in real estate," says Hoffman, son of the late Chicago homebuilding legend Jack Hoffman, for whom the Chicago-area village of Hoffman Estates is named.

So now, the company is in a holding pattern, waiting for lenders to extend more credit, for municipalities to ease design restrictions and impact fees (one-time charges for builders and developers) and for the flood of foreclosures to slow. As long as foreclosures continue to mount — Illinois now ranks sixth highest in the nation — home prices are kept lower than the natural laws of supply and demand ordinarily would dictate.

For now, his company is working as a consultant with banks to manage the bulging inventory of properties they've taken over. "You have to be flexible to the point of thinking of things you never would have thought of before," Hoffman says.

Recovery will be painfully slow and will take years, he says. When it comes, he expects to see smaller houses and greener homes being built.

"In the run-up to 2006, it wasn't a question of just having shelter. Having a house became a privilege rather than a necessity. People wanted granite instead of Formica, ceramic instead of vinyl on the floors. Now the builders that survive will have to get back to basics."

That also means basics in green design. Owners have been inundated with the green message and are looking to have at

minimum houses that are better insulated and systems and appliances that are more efficient than in the past, Hoffman says.

Home building is just one of the industries waiting for positive turns in the economic forecast and to see how consumers' lifestyles and desires will emerge after the slump.

And there are reasons for optimism, just more than a year after Lehman Brothers Inc. collapsed in September of 2008, spinning the world into a financial panic.

**One of the most** positive messages was acknowledgment of relief from the top. Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke said September 15 that "from a technical perspective, the recession is very likely over."

Stocks have climbed back close to 50 percent since their March 9 low. At the end of September, the consumer confidence index was at 53.1, rebounding from a 42-year low of 25 in February. However, it takes a reading of 100 to signal strong growth.

Retail sales gained 2.7 percent from July to August, the largest jump in three years, thanks in large part to this summer's wildly popular "Cash for Clunkers" program, which offered consumers rebates of \$3,500 and \$4,500 to trade in their older cars and trucks for more fuel-efficient models. Suddenly, beleaguered auto dealers couldn't keep enough cars on the lot.

And in September, national home sales saw a fourth-straight monthly rise. In Illinois, home sales were up in 32 of 99 counties surveyed from August 2008 to August 2009 — up as much as 33.6 percent in DeKalb County, according to the Illinois Association of Realtors.

But one area still mired in the depths of recession is job loss, which continues to climb to levels not seen in 26 years. The number of the nation's unemployed grew to 9.8 percent for September. Bernanke acknowledged in his September economic forecast that although the economic outlook is improving, job loss is likely to persist and the nation likely will see 10 percent unemployment this year. Since December of 2007, the nation has lost a net total of 6.9 million jobs, 342,800 of them in Illinois.

In Illinois, unemployment in August was 10 percent, slightly down from 10.4 percent in July. As in past recessions, current job loss is seen as a lagging indicator — the rest of the economy will get better before we see significant improvement in the jobs forecast.

“Job creation will be slow to bounce back,” says John Challenger, chief executive officer of the national outplacement firm Challenger, Gray & Christmas headquartered in Chicago. “Employers are sitting on the people they have. Before they create a lot of jobs, they will move part-timers to full-time, hire temporary workers and pay overtime.”

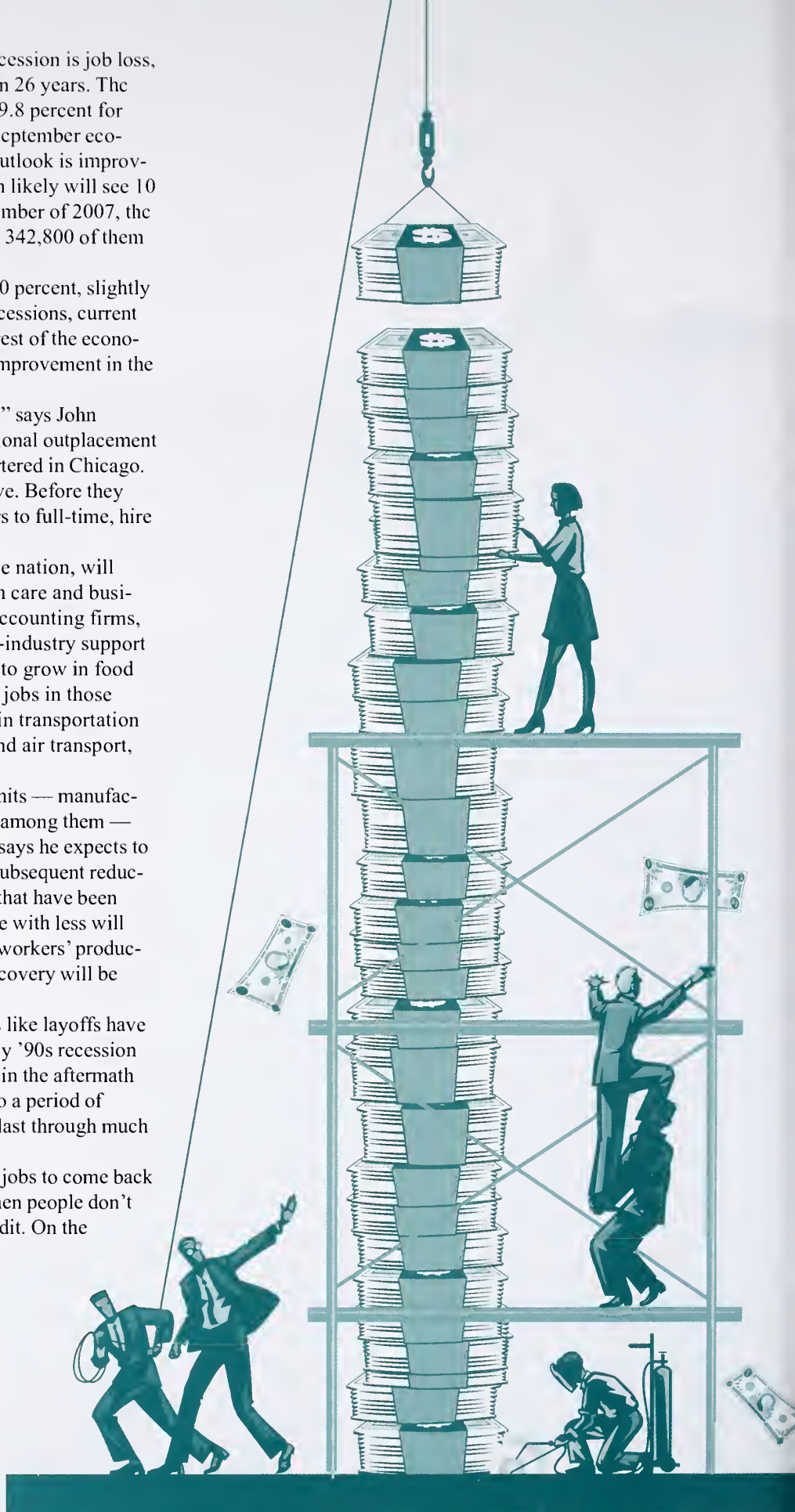
Challenger says Illinois, like the rest of the nation, will move into an economy based more on health care and business services — consulting, law firms and accounting firms, for instance — than on manufacturing, auto-industry support and construction. Illinois will also continue to grow in food and agriculture sectors and will create more jobs in those areas. Chicago will grow as a global leader in transportation and logistics, a hub for shipping, trucking and air transport, he says.

Since some of the areas taking the biggest hits — manufacturing, home building and construction chief among them — were heavily dominated by men, Challenger says he expects to see a more gender-balanced work force and subsequent reduction in the pay gap between the sexes. Staffs that have been pared to the bone and have learned to do more with less will increasingly be looking for ways to measure workers' productivity and base more pay on performance. Recovery will be very slow, Challenger says.

“Nobody's creating too many jobs. It looks like layoffs have slowed down. It took 15 months after the early '90s recession for job creation to recover. It took 19 months in the aftermath of the 2001 recession. Now we've moved into a period of recovery over the summer, which will likely last through much of 2010,” he says.

Analysts and economists also don't expect jobs to come back to pre-recession levels anytime soon. And when people don't have jobs, lenders are not quick to extend credit. On the positive side, since access to credit is harder to get, people who had funded lifestyles that were way beyond their reach are paying down their debt instead of adding to it and saving more. But tighter credit also keeps money from flowing to businesses and families and frustrates consumers trying to move forward.

In Illinois, consumers' complaints about how their debt is being handled — including concerns about mortgage and credit card





debt and actions by collection agencies — were 28 percent higher in 2008 than in 2007, Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan reported.

Attempts to resuscitate cash flow — most notably the Fed's drop in the federal funds interest rate from 2 percent to 0.25 percent in December of 2008 and the \$787 billion federal stimulus package approved this year — are helping put money back into consumers' hands, says Andrew Busch, senior fellow on economic matters at the Illinois Policy Institute, a Chicago-based think tank.

"There's a tremendous amount of money floating around in the system," Busch says. "Somehow it will find its way to the consumer. It will be more expensive than it has been because lenders are demanding a higher rate of return. Eventually it will ease. It may take 18 to 24 months to get a stabilization in consumer credit."

During that period, consumers would be wise to stay in the stock market, says Busch, who expects 15 percent to 20 percent growth in stocks over the next 18 months. Companies have reduced employment and inventories, and recent growth has exceeded analysts' expectations in the second half of this year.

The question is what happens after that. Stimulus, credit support and monetary easing come with a cost. They have added to the national debt, and that will have to be addressed at some point. Without a careful exit strategy for those unprecedented programs, Busch says, we will experience a waterfall effect that can lead to massive inflation.

Greg McBride, senior financial analyst for Bankrate.com, views the availability of credit in terms of a pendulum — one that had swung way too far toward easy credit before the financial collapse.

"Before the recession, if you could fog a mirror, you could get a loan," McBride says. "People were getting loans without being able to document their income or prove their credit was good. Now the pendulum has swung to the restrictive side. Ultimately, we will settle in the middle. It will loosen, but we're not going to get close to the go-go days of the housing boom."

McBride predicts we will soon see the return of more of the lower down-payment programs — 5 percent and 10 percent down as opposed to the 20 percent to 25 percent generally required now — but he says no longer will consumers get a house without the three fundamentals: good credit, proof of income and money for a down payment.

Consumers who had counted on their homes to fund their retirements and now have watched the value sink, or those who lost homes they can no longer afford, are also rethinking

when they can retire and what that might look like.

Some have cut back on or stopped funding retirement so they can pay other bills. According to an AARP survey this year, 36 percent of people ages 45 to 54 have stopped putting money into their 401(k) or other retirement accounts.



**People close to** retirement age have watched their investments wither. Even the traditional stock portfolio of 60 percent stocks/40 percent bonds that had weathered previous downturns was taking a hit in 2008 and depleting nest eggs, says certified financial planner Jeff Rose, co-founder of Alliance Investment Planning Group in Carbondale.

"Even in 2001-2002 and prior bear markets, this portfolio had held its own. But in 2008 — traditional portfolios were down 15 to 25 percent. For comparison, in 2002, they were down only about 7 percent [to 10 percent]."

"No one saw this coming. I'm more in the 15 percent to 25 percent in stocks and the rest in bonds right now, depending on the retiree's situation," Rose says.

Many who expected to be in their peak earning years have lost their jobs, and those who haven't may have lost confidence in their 401(k)s as more employers have cut back or stopped the company match. Even if your employer has stopped contributing to it, 401(k)s are still the best retirement vehicle out there, Rose says.

"No other avenues will allow you to save as much pretax," he says. The trick is knowing what you have and educating yourself on the options offered, he says.

When credit eases, home values increase and people have more to spend and more confidence in spending it, retailers may find shoppers' habits have changed, and competition will be fierce. Before the recession, consumers who felt more secure in their jobs and home values had the disposable income to satisfy their curiosity for items such as expensive phones and electronic gadgets and were able to spend more on bigger vehicles and expensive vacations.

A recent IBM study, *Shopper Advocacy: Building Consumer Trust in the New Economic Environment*, shows that tighter budgets and lower confidence have upended consumer behavior and made purchasers more willing to shop only with retailers they trust. Their answers indicated a new wave of fiscal conservatism.

Two-thirds of consumers surveyed said they are postponing purchases or buying fewer items, while 60 percent said they are more often looking for sales and using more coupons.

Shoppers indicated those habits will last even after the economy recovers.

Similarly, in a recent survey by the Consumer Reports National Research Center, 71 percent of respondents said during the economic downturn, they have purchased only what they absolutely needed; 61 percent said they ate dinner out less often; and 58 percent spent less on vacations. Many respondents said they would continue those behaviors after the recession is over.

"I'm very skeptical that we'll have a generation of anything close to the frugality we saw after the Great Depression," McBride says. "American consumers like their fancy cars, their nice restaurants, their big houses and their overpriced coffee. Consumers are striking the balance between cutting back but not living a Spartan existence."

"Instead of \$4 coffee every morning, it will be \$4 coffee three times a week." □

Marcia Frellick is a Chicago-based freelance writer.

# Fast tracks

Is trouble around the bend for high-speed rail in Illinois?  
Probably, but passenger train advocates finally get their day — and dollars

by Mike Ramsey

Suddenly, for long-ignored advocates of passenger rail in Illinois and across the country, it was raining money — at least potential money. Early this year, President Barack Obama's newly installed administration poured into the economic stimulus package \$8 billion for grants to states that are developing high-speed train corridors.

With subsequent congressional approval of the larger plan, Washington, D.C.'s attitude toward trains had done an abrupt turnaround. Just a few years earlier, President George W. Bush's administration had sought to break up subsidy-reliant Amtrak and foist its operating costs on states. The proposed strategy may have died quietly, but it further dampened the idea of an American rail renaissance that proponents say would offset highway and airport congestion while stimulating economic development.

Rick Harnish, for one, was floored by this year's turn of events. As the Chicago-based director of the Midwest High Speed Rail Association, he had lobbied state and federal lawmakers for years to keep Amtrak alive, let alone offer funds to make intercity passenger trains go faster. "I just stood there in shock, going, 'There's no way it's \$8 billion,'" Harnish says of his initial reaction to the windfall. "And it was. It was an amazing change."

But with amazing change comes inevitable disappointments, political controversy and increased criticism that the cost of high-speed rail will burden tax-

payers at a time when governments already are broke.

Eight billion dollars doesn't seem so significant when stacked against the tens of billions of dollars that states and regions would need to realize key rail projects. It's expected to take \$40 billion, for example, to pay for California's ambitious plan to run European- or Japanese-style bullet trains from Sacramento to San Diego. Illinois' centerpiece passenger rail project to simply upgrade the Chicago-to-St. Louis rail corridor was once estimated to cost about \$500 million, but the project really requires at least an additional \$2.5 billion to be done right, state transportation officials say.

The price bump is attributed to the growth plans of freight railroad Union Pacific, which owns most of the corridor's tracks. The Illinois Department of Transportation is shooting for 2014 to have the entire route double-tracked, which is different from its earlier, more modest strategy of using occasional sidings to allow one train to pass while another waits. Either way, Amtrak trains would be allowed to increase their current top speed of 79 mph to 110 mph, shaving a couple of hours off the nearly six-hour trip from Lake Michigan to eastern Missouri.

**The Federal Railroad Administration** will select recipients of the \$8 billion this winter, the agency has said. Administrator Joe Szabo, a former rail union boss from Illinois, concedes that

demand for the money will far exceed the supply, given that 40 states and the District of Columbia applied for a combined \$102 billion in earlier rounds of applications. But he says the initial \$8 billion pot of federal cash is a "down payment" on President Obama's ambitious program, which is likened to President Dwight Eisenhower's highway construction legacy. Obama wants to spend at least an additional \$1 billion annually on rail development over the next five years. Yet that's still a drop in the bucket, and states will be expected to pony up significant matching funds.

"The overwhelming response we have received demonstrates the pent-up demand for high-speed and intercity passenger rail," Szabo told rail industry representatives in Chicago in September. "We know the pressure is on to get this done right at the outset by selecting the best projects that yield quick and tangible benefits."

The Chicago-to-St. Louis rail revamp is billed as shovel-ready, and it's bolstered by funds from a new state public-works program that includes \$850 million for rail initiatives. In its applications to the Federal Railroad Administration, the Illinois Department of Transportation reportedly has asked for more than \$4 billion, which would help the state pay for a wide array of rail-expansion projects. Chicago is envisioned as the hub of a nine-state passenger rail network for the Midwest.

"We're looking for a substantial



amount because the Midwest has done a lot of work already,” George Weber, chief of IDOT’s railroad bureau, says. “It’s probably somewhat unrealistic to think that we would get \$4 billion with other big projects out there. But we also want to make sure that we put ourselves in position for future rounds of funding.”

Weber, a nearly 20-year veteran of the agency, is among the rail advocates who are savoring the sea change. He has seen Illinois’ support of intrastate Amtrak service ebb and flow, but the momentum notably swung in favor of passenger rail in 2006. That’s when Illinois lawmakers and then-Gov. Rod Blagojevich decided to increase the number of Amtrak trains on three downstate corridors emanating from Chicago.

The Chicago-St. Louis route now has three state-sponsored trains running back and forth, plus two trains from Amtrak’s national network that make stops in Illinois. Yearly ridership on the corridor grew from 477,888 in fiscal 2007 to 543,642 in fiscal 2008, Amtrak says. The numbers don’t indicate how full the trains were over the period, but passenger-rail proponents say clearly more people will ride medium-distance trains if they’re given greater scheduling flexibility. With faster trains and additional frequencies, ridership on the corridor would rise to 1.2 million annually, IDOT says.

**With all of** the competition for the stimulus funds and relatively tight deadlines (final requests were due Oct. 2), Illinois had to move quickly to seek its share. Too quickly, some would say. That dynamic has led to controversy in the state capital of Springfield, a midway stop on the Chicago-St. Louis line.

Using a 2003 environmental impact study, IDOT pushed ahead with earlier plans to use the Union Pacific tracks along Third Street, which splits Springfield’s downtown and medical district. The daily number of passenger and freight trains would more than double to 40, a prospect that alarms some local officials and residents. They began balking at IDOT’s strategy over the summer and have gotten increased political traction. “IDOT needs to follow its own guidelines, where you get more people involved earlier on,” complains grassroots organizer Steve Combs, who lives



*A high-speed rail train, the Javelin, at London’s St. Pancras railway station*

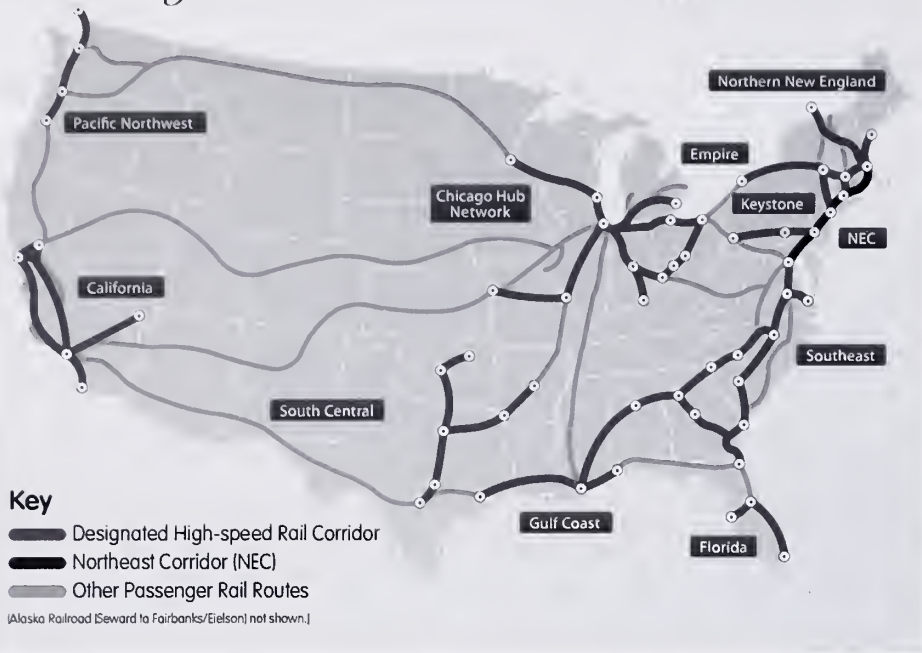
in the historic Enos Park neighborhood that he says would be disfigured by a series of rail overpasses. “From the local citizens’ perspective, I guess you have to go through this type of democratic process of trying to be heard.”

City and county leaders previously supported rail expansion as good for Springfield’s future, but they are pushing for a long-discussed proposal to consolidate rail traffic farther away from downtown, along 10th Street on Norfolk Southern Railroad tracks. The 10th Street alternative, however, faces opposition from residents along that route.

Local officials have threatened legal opposition to the IDOT plan, and by late September, even Illinois House Speaker Michael Madigan, a Chicago Democrat, weighed in, siding with Springfield by sponsoring a bill to block IDOT from spending funds along the Third Street tracks. In early October, the agency said the 10th Street Corridor will be considered as an alternative if the city of Springfield completes an environmental impact study.

A striking contrast can be found about 100 miles to the north, in the college city of Normal. The home of Illinois State University has put out the welcome wagon for high-speed rail, even though the corridor goes through the downtown there. The city has acquired land and socked away about half the funding to

## VISION for HIGH-SPEED RAIL in AMERICA



*High-speed rail routes as proposed by President Barack Obama's administration*

build a \$45 million transportation center, which is part of a broader plan to redevelop the central business district. "We see this service as having huge economic development benefits for the community," Normal city manager Mark Peterson said. "The benefits, we believe, will far outweigh any inconveniences that are created."

Even if the Springfield controversy can be smoothed, other significant challenges lay ahead for high-speed rail in Illinois. They include mitigating potential danger to a federally protected species of dragonfly near Joliet. There is also Union Pacific's obligation to develop a "positive train control" system that would ensure safety and reliability. A previous prototype being developed for the Chicago-to-St. Louis corridor was quietly scrapped.

**If Obama's rail** development program has stirred proponents, it's had a galvanizing effect, too, for critics who for years have been skeptical of proposals to build faster train networks. First, of course, there's the name: high-speed rail, which to many observers is a hyped phrase. The 110 mph goal for many of the proposed new trains is similar to top speeds locomotives hit on open stretches

of track during the 1930s and 1940s heyday of railroads.

Skeptics insist it's not wise or desirable to try to expand intercity passenger rail, particularly on such a grand scale. They doubt enough travelers would climb aboard to justify the public development cost and future operating subsidies. IDOT's Weber concedes that the state's annual passenger rail budget could nearly double from today's \$28 million to \$50 million a year if a number of proposed expansions come to fruition.

That kind of increased expense alarms Kristina Rasmussen, executive vice president of the Illinois Policy Institute. "Just because the [federal] money is being dangled out there doesn't mean you have to bite, especially if it puts you on the hook later for a variety of unknown costs," she says.

Her organization sponsored a recent report by Cato Institute senior fellow Randal O'Toole that casts high-speed rail as a pricey boondoggle. O'Toole estimated it would cost each U.S. taxpayer \$1,000 to pay for a ramped-up national rail system, while the average Illinois resident would ride a round-trip train only once every nine years. Rasmussen, who contributed to the report, argues state government would be better off

using stimulus money to improve safety at existing rail crossings and to make road signals more efficient for motorists. She concedes the Federal Railroad Administration would probably balk at such a use for high-speed rail grants. Her suggestion: Walk away from the money.

Harnish says increased vocal opposition is probably a good sign that passenger-rail development in the United States is finally ripe. But his advocacy group isn't spending as much time these days lobbying for completion of 110 mph corridors. Rather, the Midwest High-Speed Rail Association now is urging Illinois to simultaneously make plans for a 220 mph bullet train that would whisk travelers from Chicago's O'Hare International Airport to St. Louis in about two hours. The potential cost "is not going to be a small amount of money," Harnish concedes. He estimates the price tag at \$14 billion.

Is his organization losing focus? Harnish says high-speed rail in the Midwest needs a true game-changer to make passenger trains more competitive. "I've ridden 110 mph trains, and they won't have the transformative impact that people are looking for," he says. "You can't get to St. Louis any other way in two hours. ... We have to push for that. And then once that happens, it'll create the change in politics that makes it possible to do passenger trains connecting the entire Midwest."

Notwithstanding the funding issue, the proposal will probably generate internal disputes even among rail advocates in Illinois. The route that Harnish's organization highlights on promotional materials shoots east from Chicago, bypassing Amtrak cities Joliet and Normal in favor of Champaign and Decatur. Peterson, the Normal city manager, says it's premature and "silly" to map out a bullet-train route, given myriad issues that have to be studied. But he agrees the potential for 220 mph should be examined.

Back at IDOT, Weber declines to wade into the looming debate, saying bullet trains are decades away for the United States. The agency has asked for study funds, but he has his hands full trying to make 110 mph trains happen in Illinois. "We want to learn to walk before we can run." □

*Mike Ramsey is a Chicago-based writer.*



# Opportunity knocks

A black and white photograph showing a large, muscular hand reaching down from the top right, grasping and tipping over a large, heavy rock. The rock is on the left, and its curved top is being pushed over by the hand. The background is a light, textured surface.

Whether Illinois Republicans can capitalize  
on Democratic missteps remains to be seen

by Joseph Ryan

After nearly seven years of total Democratic rule in Illinois, voters can easily tally the results — an indicted governor who allegedly sold out the state to the highest bidders, a big push for a major income tax hike and a budget so far in the red that contractors routinely get stiffed.

That is why Republicans believe they can finally run a winning statewide race. But not so fast.

Case in point: the Republicans' coming out day at the Illinois State Fair in August. It was a perfect opportunity to command the spotlight, blast Democrats and promise something better for Illinois.

Chance blown.

The party's own chairman, Andy McKenna, seemed to upstage GOP efforts to appear as a renewed political force when he took that day to abruptly resign his post.

Then upstart gubernatorial candidate state Sen. Matt Murphy used the platform to run negative TV campaign ads in Republican-rich central Illinois. The ads were aimed at blasting another suburban GOP candidate as a tax-and-spend liberal.

(Just weeks later, Murphy dropped out of the race to pair up with McKenna's bid for governor as a lieutenant governor hopeful.)

The State Fair event was yet another example of a dysfunctional party as its own worst enemy, even as the stars have clearly aligned in its favor.

"You could look at this situation and say, 'It should be a strong Republican year,'" says Mike Lawrence, a veteran political analyst and former director of the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute at Southern Illinois University. "What I'm saying is that is far from guaranteed. It is far from automatic."

Still, top Republicans insist they will not blow the chance they've been handed by Democrats. Party leaders have a plan, and it goes something like this:

- Use U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk's Senate bid as a national financial draw, utilizing the infrastructure built for that contest to help the party's entire ticket.
- Focus resources like a laser on the governor's mansion. The governor's seat is critical to having leverage over the next redistricting map, which in turn is critical to winning back the Illinois Senate and House.

- Capitalize on the so-called Tea Party movement and traditional midterm backlash. At least one top-tier congressional race is expected to draw attention and money with a strong challenge against Democrat Bill Foster of Geneva, who now holds former GOP House Speaker J. Dennis Hastert's west suburban seat.
- Target three or four key Illinois Senate seats. Among them, the battles are expected to include challenges to Democrats Mike Noland in the Elgin-based 22nd District and Michael Bond of Grayslake in the north suburban 31st District. The GOP can claim victory if it is able to end the Democrats' current supermajority in the Senate, even if it doesn't gain control in that chamber.
- In the Illinois House, zero in on a handful of seats, mostly in the northwest suburbs, where anti-Todd Stroger and anti-tax rhetoric will play well. The GOP has no real hope of winning control in either the House or Senate, party leaders concede openly, given the Democrats' huge edge in cash and party organization. Plus, the GOP is playing on a Democrat-drawn district map.
- Keep the message focused on ethics and fiscal responsibility. Doing so not only capitalizes on Blagojevich and the Democratic tax hike push, but it veers the conversation away from social issues such as abortion, guns and gay rights that most often divide the GOP internally.

On its face, the plan seems plausible.

If all goes well, the Republicans will have a solid chance to cut into the Democratic majorities in the House and Senate and take the state's top two posts. By the following election cycle, the GOP could aim to regain control of the entire Illinois political landscape.

"If we win that governor's seat and that Senate seat, we are back in business," says new Illinois Republican Party chairman Pat Brady. "This has to be done incrementally. First and foremost is the Senate and governor's mansion."

But that is still just a best-case-scenario plan subject to many influences outside any strategist's control. Plus, if anything, Republicans have shown reluctance to

## Whom to watch in the GOP and what to look for



**U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk of Highland Park**

Given his financial backing and name recognition, winning the GOP U.S. Senate primary should be a given for Kirk. But watch how he walks the tightrope between conservative and moderate activists in his own party. If he can manage to bridge that divide, it bodes well for Republicans up and down the ballot in the general election.

follow such road maps, particularly when it comes to the first step: primary elections.

Unlike the Democrats, who have a natural edge in fundraising, volunteers and state demographics, Republicans don't have the luxury to lose face and steam in bitter primary battles. Moreover, they lack a clear leadership structure like Chicago Democratic clans can often use to keep damage to a minimum.

Republicans most often win in Illinois through the consensus of active interest groups and fundraisers, combined with a compelling message that independent voters buy.

Former Elgin state Sen. Steve Rauschenberger, who now heads the United Republican Fund, says the GOP's distinct electoral disadvantage has been its inability to heal internal wounds after primaries.

"There is no senior leadership around the Republican Party with enough respect to bring the elements together," says Rauschenberger, who plans to make a run to win back his old 22nd District seat. "The Republican Party has to find its new face and new leadership vision."





**Andy McKenna, former party chairman from Chicago**

Before he stepped down as party chairman, the former failed statewide candidate was angling for a U.S. Senate bid, potentially undermining Kirk, even though he praised the north suburbanite's candidacy and has long blasted divisive primaries. Since stepping down, McKenna has

been running for governor, adding to a field crowded with known commodities. But if he does gain steam, can Republicans rally around a latecomer who riled the conservative wing as party leader and angered some moderate forces by running in the first place?

**State Sen. Kirk Dillard of Hinsdale and DuPage County Board chairman Bob Schillerstrom of Naperville**

A nasty bout between these two contenders for governor could fracture the all-important suburban vote in the last remaining Chicago-area GOP bastion, DuPage County. If they can play well together, that will pay dividends for the entire party.



**State Sen. Bill Brady of Bloomington and conservative commentator Dan Proft of Wheaton**

These gubernatorial candidates are among those seen as representing the conservative wing of the party. If they gain high vote totals, or win, that is a clear sign the party's active electorate is heading further right, and many think that won't help a statewide general election bid in the liberal-leaning state.

**Attorney general candidate Steve Kim, a Northbrook lawyer, and secretary of state challenger Robert Enriquez, an Aurora businessman**

Few expect these little-known contenders to win against Democratic powerhouses Lisa Madigan and Jesse White. But, they could help bring minority voters into the GOP fold. If they can win any attention (and that would require considerable effort), that is a good thing for the party. If they are seen as token contenders rather than a serious outreach effort by the party, the move could backfire.

That is why this upcoming primary is so critical for Republicans.

The animosity sown in these battles, the money wasted or the costly infrastructure built — not to mention the candidates that emerge — are all critical factors that will influence the comeback road map.

Aside from the State Fair this summer, an illustration of what problems lay ahead for the party can clearly be seen in the already rocky start by favored GOP Senate contender Mark Kirk — who some believe is the linchpin of the plan for a Republican comeback.

Many state and national GOP leaders came out early in support of Kirk (some endorsing him back during the Republican National Convention), hoping to



**Roger Keats of Wilmette, candidate for Cook County Board president**

To help the party, the former state lawmaker doesn't have to win his run for Cook County Board president. He only has to draw attention in the general election to bring a focus on Cook County corruption and fiscal issues that would in turn boost the chances of Republican statewide and district-level candidates. "When we're passing out our nominating petitions, I just say, 'We're the team against Todd Stroger,'" Keats told supporters at September's Cook County GOP convention.

Keats told supporters at September's Cook County GOP convention.

"They all but knock me down trying to get the petition out of my hands, saying, 'Where do I sign?'" Keats is favored in the primary by the GOP establishment, but he is expected to face a challenge.

chase away any other well-known or well-funded challengers.

Although the strategy appears to have worked, the moderate north suburban congressman still might not gain support from the more active elements of his party's conservative base.

Kirk has made a name for himself as a moderate willing to buck the party on key social issues such as abortion and gay rights. That has helped him consistently win elections — even against strong Democratic challengers — in the 10th District, where voters regularly choose liberals in other ballot contests.

Yet some in the Republican Party don't view those traits as desirable in a GOP candidate. The threat of a divisive primary that even further erodes Kirk's support among the party's base was evident this summer.

A slew of groups with social policy interests have backed little-known candidate Patrick Hughes, a party activist and real estate developer from Hinsdale. Paul Caprio, head of Family-PAC Federal, an anti-abortion group, was one of those to sign an open letter supporting Hughes for Senate.

Caprio doesn't believe the contention that damaging Kirk will undermine the GOP's chances in the general election. He points to Peter Fitzgerald's 1998 victory in his U.S. Senate bid as a sign that a true-blood conservative on social issues can win statewide even after upsetting the party brass' favorite.

"We feel that primaries are healthy for the party," Caprio says of the decision to back Hughes. "It is an opportunity to bring new people into the party and focus the attention of Republicans on their differences, so the best possible Republican can be nominated."

When asked whether he and his followers could support Kirk after the primary, Caprio replies: "I think the question that you might want to ask Mark Kirk is if he is ready to endorse Pat Hughes."

Caprio later adds, "I think it depends on the tenor of the primary, as long as the candidates stick to issues and not personalities, and also on how the party leadership manages the primary."

Many fear that if Kirk comes out of the primary irreparably separated from the party's conservative base, he will have

trouble winning statewide and therefore difficulty drawing the national support needed to help down-ballot contests. A lesser known and more conservative candidate winning the nomination could have an even greater negative impact in the general election.

The cracks are already appearing.

Kirk's early primary run has been a dizzying study in tightrope walking.

On the campaign trail, he blasts government spending, carefully avoiding the reality that he voted for the massive Wall Street bailout last year.

And when he announced his Senate bid in July, Kirk's office was flooded with angry calls about his vote for President Barack Obama's coveted cap-and-trade energy legislation.

At an August congressional break meeting on health care reform, Kirk sat next to U.S. Rep. Judy Biggert of Hinsdale before Naperville business leaders while she blasted cap-and-trade as an egregious middle-class tax hike. Biggert is actually a huge Kirk supporter, but she couldn't sugar coat the issue, even with him at her side.

Kirk defended his vote that day as an effort to wean America off foreign oil and therefore a vote for national security. Now Kirk says he won't vote for the legislation if he is in the Senate, and he only supported it because district residents wanted him to do so.

All this comes even before his primary opponents have started slinging mud.

Regardless, the February primary allows for about a six-month cooling off period before the general election battle really begins to heat up next summer.

GOP chairman Brady is counting on that window to heal the wounds of primary battles, and he hopes the drive to regain power, along with a surge in Republican anger over Democratic rule at state and federal levels, will overcome common grievances.

"I think the party is a lot more unified than in previous election cycles," Brady says. "They are sick of being in the minority and not being in control."

In part, Brady's hopes are buoyed by the fact that the dominant issues of the election cycle appear to be fiscal matters and ethics, with Democrats having seemingly run the state budget and moral compass into the ground over the past six

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***"I think the party is a lot more unified than in previous election cycles. They are sick of being in the minority and not being in control."***

**—Pat Brady  
GOP chairman**

years. That keeps attention away from issues such as guns and abortion that can divide the party and scare away moderate independent voters who are crucial for victory.

"Those two messages are going to resonate," Brady says.

Rauschenberger, a policy wonk often on the conservative side of the spectrum who lost a bid for lieutenant governor in 2006, agrees.

Rauschenberger believes poll numbers paint a promising picture. He doesn't see more and more voters turning Democratic in the state; they are turning independent and just happen to have favored Democrats lately.

Those voters, he claims, can be won back with the right message.

"You have to make that connection with the independent voter," he says. "You have to lose your negative message and turn it around with a positive set of proposals."

So, there is a plan, there is a will and there appears to be a way. Still, many are hesitant to say there is a probability, and few are willing to place their bets on red ... yet.

"I think we will have a lot better sense of this after we see the primaries," says Lawrence, who was a top aide to the last popular Republican governor, Jim Edgar. "The Republicans seem to have a capacity for cannibalism. And you are seeing the beginnings of it already." □

*Joseph Ryan is a political writer for the Arlington Heights-based Daily Herald.*



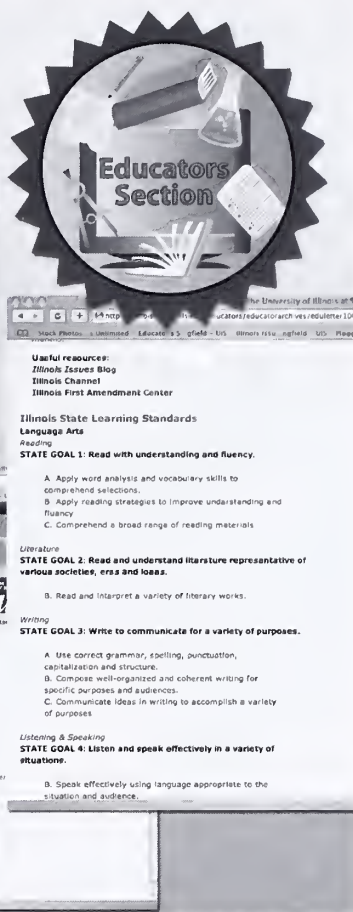
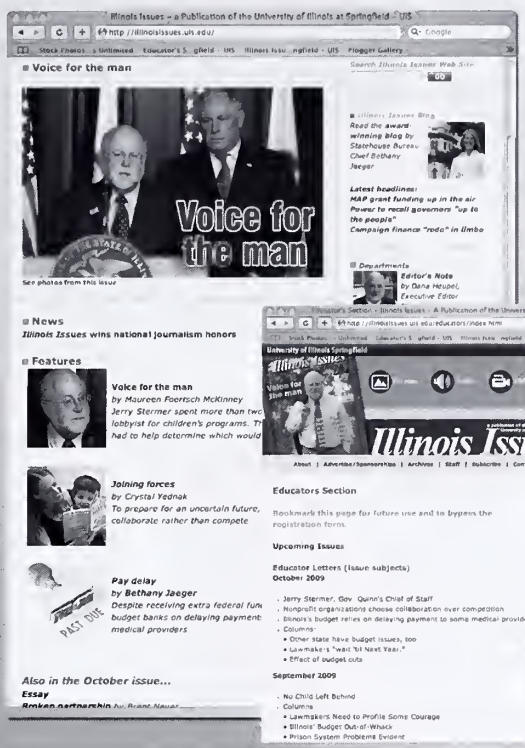
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## A new pillar of design

A statewide capital construction program and a new architect of the Illinois Capitol spark optimism that renovations at the Statehouse and the surrounding property can move forward.

**J. Richard Alsop III** was selected as the architect of the Capitol in a national search conducted by House and Senate officers and approved by a committee of legislative leaders. He will earn \$105,714 a year.

Alsop replaces **Donald McLarty**, who worked 18 months on the job before resigning in April 2008 to return to the private sector.

Alsop will begin November 16 in the midst of a long-term plan to renovate the Capitol, including upgrading the heating and air conditioning system, remodeling space to adhere to the Americans with Disabilities Act and restoring historically documented finishes of the interior walls.

The master renovation plan includes replacing the less architecturally appealing Stratton building, which sits next to the Capitol and houses legislative offices and support services.

He must carry out those plans according to the legislature's wishes because the General Assembly is the architect's



*J. Richard Alsop III*

boss and his client. That's a new type of customer for Alsop, who has been a partner in the private firm of Charette Architects in Charlotte, N.C. He also is owner and manager of the property management firm Maxwell Cooper.

He holds both a bachelor of arts in architecture degree and a bachelor of architecture degree from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. He also earned a master's degree from Harvard University's Graduate School of Design.

Tim Mapes, chief of staff to House Speaker Michael Madigan, says Alsop's

background stands out from several dozen candidates and shows that he can manage a lot of different tasks with competing interests. "The job is unique to state capitols, requiring someone who can balance historic preservation of the Capitol complex with the day-to-day functionality needed by the legislature and the public."

Alsop says buildings are organic and evolve over time, but he intends to approach changes with sensitivity to the original design, style and purpose.

"There's something about walking up to a building that has classic lines, classic architecture. And it feels solid, which is how you essentially want your state government to feel," he says. "The buildings say a lot about people who inhabit [them]."

He says he is attracted to the Illinois Capitol in part because it's listed on the National Register of Historic Places. "It's an impressive building. It's awe-inspiring. And being able to work at that level on that building and the buildings around it, I'm just excited to be a part of it."

By moving to Springfield, he also will be closer to family. His wife is a Springfield native.

*Bethany Jaeger*

## Shifts at the top



*David Vaught*

• **David Vaught** is Gov. Pat Quinn's new budget director, replacing **Ginger Ostro**. She is now senior policy adviser to the Illinois Student Assistance Commission, an independent state agency that offers financial aid to low-income college students.

Vaught, an attorney and financial analyst, had worked for Quinn when he was state treasurer. He later became a senior policy adviser to Quinn in the governor's office. Vaught formerly chaired the Illinois Procurement Policy Board and was on the Illinois Student Assistance Commission.

In the private sector, he was managing director for Mitchell Vaught & Taylor Investment Advisors. As a lawyer, he specialized in tax consulting, financial planning and investment advice.

He is a graduate of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point and served in the Army's 82nd Airborne Division. He earned his law degree from Southern Illinois University.

Ostro became budget director under then-Gov. Rod Blagojevich in early 2007. She was key in creating the Illinois Depart-

ment of Juvenile Justice and Blagojevich's program to offer state-subsidized preschool to low- and middle-income families.

She previously was budget director at Governors State University and at Chicago Metropolis 2020, a nonprofit business group. She holds a bachelor's degree from the University of Chicago and a master's degree in public policy from Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government.

• **Michelle Saddler** is now secretary of the state Department of Human Services. She most recently was vice president for international adoptions for Lifelink Corp., as well as executive director of the Illinois Metropolitan Investment Fund. She previously served as Quinn's director of investments when he was treasurer. She earned her bachelor's degree from Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs and a master's degree from Northwestern University's Kellogg Graduate School of Management.

She replaces **Carol Adams**, appointed by Blagojevich six years ago. Adams will remain a policy adviser to Quinn until January, when she will move to Africa to serve as Illinois' trade and investment officer for the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity.

**For updated news see the *Illinois Issues* Web site at <http://illinoisissues.uis.edu>**



## Big people on campus

Former University of Illinois president **Stanley Ikenberry** was selected by the revamped board of trustees to serve as interim president when **B. Joseph White** resigns December 31.

Ikenberry served 16 years as university president before retiring in 1995.

White submitted his resignation after a *Chicago Tribune* investigation revealed heavy political influence in the admissions process, favoring about 800 clout-heavy students over more qualified applicants (see *Illinois Issues*, October, page 9, and September, page 10).

After seven of the nine trustees resigned, Gov. Pat Quinn made six new appointments and one reappointment. The new board, chaired by Chicago businessman Christopher Kennedy, in early October named Ikenberry as interim-president designate. He immediately started working with White and the administration to help ease the transition. He officially takes over January 1 and will serve until a permanent president is hired.

A 19-member committee of trustees, administrators, alumni, faculty, staff and students from each of the university's three campuses will undertake the search, with the goal to have a new president in place by next fall.

White will remain as a professor of business administration at the Urbana campus.

Ikenberry still holds an appointment to the University of Illinois' Institute of Government and Public Affairs.

Before joining the university in 1979, he was senior vice president for administration at Pennsylvania State University and a professor in the Center for the Study of Higher Educa-

tion. He earned his bachelor's degree from Shepherd College in 1956 and his master's and doctoral degrees from Michigan State University in 1957 and 1960.

Ikenberry was one of 10 people *Illinois Issues* honored in 1995, on the magazine's 20th anniversary, for extraordinary public service.



*Stanley Ikenberry*



*B. Joseph White*

## Executive appointments

Gov. Pat Quinn named two new members to the Executive Ethics Commission, which was created in 2004 by then-Gov. Rod Blagojevich. It reviews internal complaints about potential violations such as performing political campaign work on state time, but it has been criticized as having no teeth and being unable to expose corruption to the public.

Quinn named **Brad McMillan** of Peoria and **Gayl Pyatt** of Pinckneyville to replace **Scott Turow** and **Ellen Craig**, both of whom resigned.

McMillan also was appointed by Quinn last spring to serve as a commissioner on the 14-member Illinois Reform Commission, which Quinn chartered after the impeachment and removal of Blagojevich. The Illinois Reform Commission recommended changes to make ethics investigations and state operations more transparent. For instance, the Executive Ethics Commission will house new pro-

curement officers to oversee the way state agencies buy goods and services, and inspectors general within state offices will be able to open investigations based on anonymous tips.

Pending Senate approval, McMillan and Pyatt will serve terms ending in June 2011 and 2012, respectively, and will earn \$37,571 a year.

McMillan will remain as executive director of the Institute for Principled Leadership in Public Service at Bradley University in Peoria. He previously served as district chief of staff for then-U.S. Rep. Ray LaHood, a Republican who is now U.S. transportation secretary under President Barack Obama. Before that, he was a lawyer and a senior staff attorney for the Illinois Supreme Court and the 3rd District Appellate Court.

He earned a law degree from Southern Illinois University and a bachelor's degree in political science from Illinois

Wesleyan University.

Pyatt is a retired attorney and has served on the Illinois Board of Higher Education and the Illinois Gaming Board. She currently serves on the Illinois Humanities Council, a nonprofit agency that receives state funding. Her term on that council runs through October 2010.

According to the Humanities Council, Pyatt has been an officer of Lincoln Academy and was the first woman to be elected president of the University of Illinois Foundation. She remains a life member of the university's alumni association. She was the Illinois representative on the National Republican Platform Committee in 1996.

She earned her bachelor's degree in English education from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and a master's degree in family studies from Michigan State University. She also holds a law degree from Southern Illinois University.



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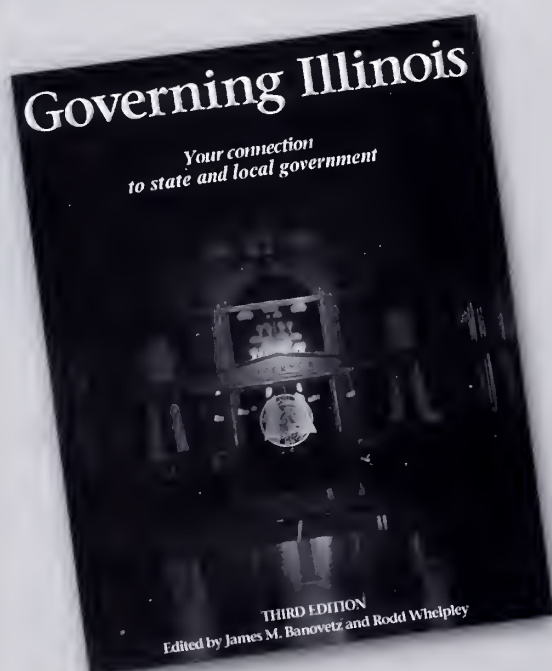
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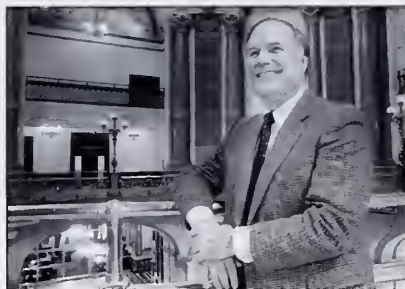
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Charles N. Wheeler III



## Panel aims to free Illinoisans from poverty

by Charles N. Wheeler III

**T**he new millennium has not been kind to many Illinois families who are struggling to make ends meet, pushing almost a quarter million more residents into poverty, researchers reported recently.

About 1 out of 8 Illinoisans — more than 1.5 million total, 526,000 of them children — were living below the poverty line last year, the U.S. Census Bureau reported. The poverty guideline, set by the federal government, was \$21,200 for a family of four in 2008.

The poverty rate of 12.2 percent — up from 10.7 percent at the start of the decade — represented about 240,000 more people in poverty, according to analysts with the Heartland Alliance Social IMPACT Research Center.

More disturbing, almost 700,000 people were living in extreme poverty, defined as an annual income of less than half the federal poverty level, or \$10,600 for a family of four last year.

Even families well above the poverty line lost ground in the 2000s, the data showed. Median household income in Illinois was \$56,235 last year, down almost \$4,000 in inflation-adjusted dollars from 2000, a drop of almost 7 percent.

Nor are the hard times limited to only certain areas in Illinois. Using year-to-year changes in key indicators such as high school graduation rates, unemploy-

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*Even families well above the poverty line lost ground in the 2000s, the data showed.*

ment rates, teen birth rates and poverty rates, the center placed 70 of the state's 102 counties on poverty watch or warning lists, from Winnebago on the Wisconsin border to Pulaski and Hardin along the Ohio River.

The current picture might be even darker, the researchers note, given that the census numbers were for 2008, and the economy has continued to slide since then, while unemployment in Illinois this year has risen to quarter-century highs.

"This data really reflects only a small portion of the recession, and we know that the economy got a lot worse since the data was collected," center researcher Amy Rynell told The Associated Press. "This is an early look at the recession."

Against this backdrop, Illinois has embarked upon an ambitious plan to dramatically cut poverty rates in the state. Leading the charge is the Commission on the Elimination of Poverty, a 26-member panel created by the General Assembly last year and charged with developing a

comprehensive plan to reach the state's ultimate goal: "that all people be free from poverty."

Twenty of the commission members are to have experience in poverty-related areas, most as advocates for housing, anti-hunger, medical care, education, mental health services or similar anti-poverty causes. The others are public officials, including four lawmakers.

Initially, the panel is to craft a strategic plan that would cut the level of extreme poverty in the state by 50 percent or more by 2015. The plan has to take into account a number of factors, including access to safe, decent and affordable housing; to adequate food and nutrition; to affordable and quality health care; to quality education and training; to dependable and affordable transportation; to quality and affordable child care; to opportunities to engage in meaningful and sustainable work that pays a living wage; and to adequate income supports.

Although the legislation called for commission members to be named last year by the governor and the legislative leaders, only three were, all appointees of House Minority Leader Tom Cross, a Republican from Oswego. As a result of the slow pace of appointments, the panel missed a March deadline to issue an interim report and likely won't be able to finish the strategic plan by year's end, as the legislation provided.

Despite the delay, the commission's work product is likely to carry some weight with lawmakers. Not only are the majority of its members linked to the leaders who appointed them, but the underlying legislation cleared both chambers without debate and with near unanimous support, 115-0 in the House and 58-0 in the Senate.

Easing their task, panel members won't have to reinvent the wheel. Solid, research-derived strategies for reducing poverty have been developed. A National Governors Association briefing paper, for example, lays out a number of options that state leaders can pursue, such as broadening unemployment insurance to cover more part-time and low-wage workers, expanding earned income tax credits, combating predatory lending practices, increasing educational and job training opportunities for adults, and strengthening early childhood education.

And Illinois is not alone in taking a comprehensive approach to reducing poverty levels. In the last few years, more than a dozen other states from Maine to

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***"Poverty has tremendous negative consequences for families and children, as well as for the U.S. economy."***

***— National Governors Association paper***

New Mexico have named similar commissions to address issues such as housing, education, health care, transportation and other obstacles that make it more difficult for folks to move up the economic ladder and out of poverty.

The rub, of course, is that most such initiatives require upfront investment, a real challenge for a state facing its worst fiscal crisis in history. But the long-term benefits are significant, especially for poor children.

"Poverty has tremendous negative consequences for families and children, as well as for the U.S. economy," the NGA paper concluded, noting research that showed children who spent their first five years in poverty, compared with children who grew up in families with incomes more than twice the poverty level, were more likely to complete less schooling, earn less as adults, have poor health, face criminal charges and become a teen parent. Nationally, the cost of childhood poverty is an estimated \$500 billion a year, according to the paper.

Given that return on investment, one hopes the poverty commission will have its blueprint ready to go by the time the Illinois economy recovers — and the governor and lawmakers finally get around to dealing with the state's budget deficit — so that the second decade of the new millennium will be brighter for the state's most vulnerable families. □

*Charles N. Wheeler III is director of the Public Affairs Reporting program at the University of Illinois Springfield.*

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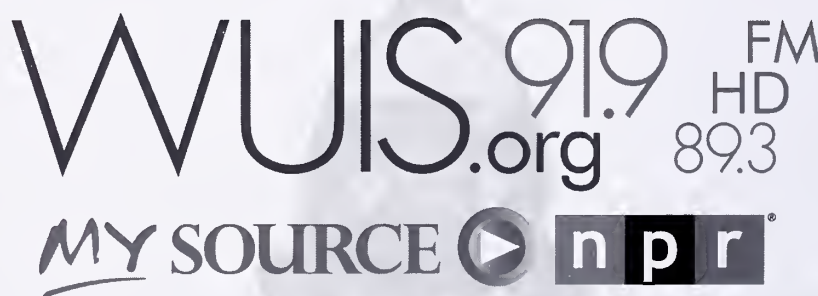
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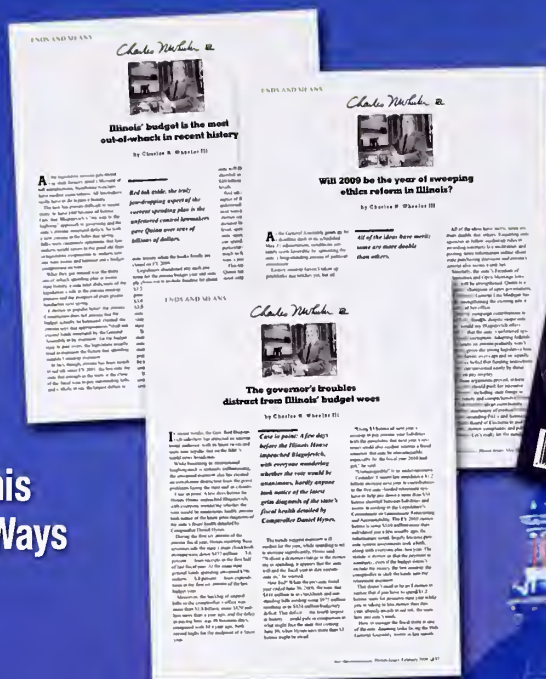




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